A stylized illustration of a woman with long, dark, wavy hair. She is wearing a black, short-sleeved top with a floral pattern of small pink flowers and green leaves. She is holding the top up with her right hand, revealing her midriff. She is wearing large, pink, hoop earrings. The background is plain white.

A BURLESQUE REVUE OF
GLAMOUR ART AND ARTISTS
COMPLETE WITH WISECRACKS,
DAMES, DOLLS, &
BARE NAKED LADIES

BY
Jim Sikke

PIN-UP **THE ILLEGITIMATE** **ART**





Silk
1971

Jim Silke
PIN-UP
THE ILLEGITIMATE
ART

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Edited by **SHAWNA GORE**

Designed by **JIM SILKE** and **CARY GRAZZINI**

Publisher **MIKE RICHARDSON**

Cover model **LISA MARIE SCOTT**

Cover typography by **JIM SILKE** with **MICHAEL DAVID THOMAS**

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Kurtesa Clarke-Silke, Lisa Marie Scott, Dave Marshall,
Davey Estrada, Chris Horn, and Cara Niece







EYE CANDY

*"Their legs in action, that's the attraction.
There's nothing like a dame!"*

—Al Dubin/*Dames* (1934)

ANYTHING GOES!

That's the credo of a musical revue and of this book. There's no narrative tension and no cliffhanging. No story. It's just a lineup of nubile, titillating lovelies cavorting from page to page as they're backed by bits of nonsense, self-deprecating humor, and pagan religion. It's a party. A frolic. A low-brow celebration of everything polite society considers false; flesh, color, bubble beads, bikinis, and impossibly beautiful women who have trouble keeping their clothes on.

To the world of legitimate art, what you'll see in this book is worthless, merely a parade of visual confections, *eye candy* that is of no more value than a penny bubble gum. Jim Silke, who is responsible for most of the beauties on parade, puts it this way:

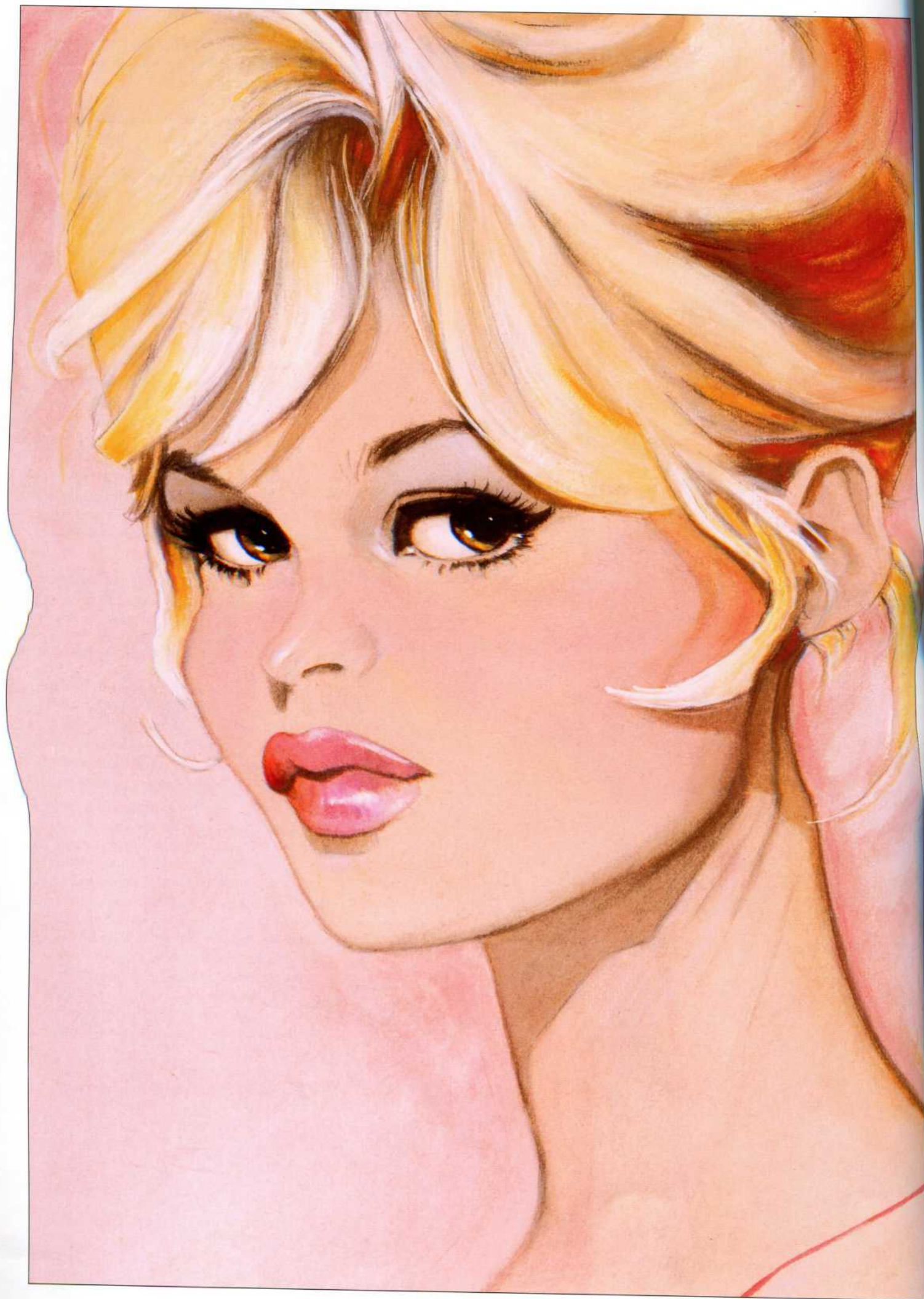
"The Lords of High Culture, academics, the privileged and religious classes, even those belonging to the fashionable commercial art world, dismiss *girl art* as trash; as pictures of pretty girls designed, staged, and costumed with the precise aim of stimulating the viewer's most vulgar urges. For these people, *pin-up art* has no redeeming social values, no aesthetic grace, no political manifesto, not even a whiff of hauteur devil worship to delight the chic Nihilists, nothing to recommend it in either the classical or modernist art traditions. No quality of redemption whatsoever."

Silke, of course, tends to get a tad uptight about the subject. That's why we decided not to let him write this book, so he wouldn't bore you with erudite opinions about the work of Kitagawa Utamaro and Edgar Degas. If we did, he just wouldn't be able to get it through

his head that given a choice between an abstract contemplation of art and the reality of Britney Spears' belly button, we're going to go with the belly button every time.

Silke, being seventy-three years old, and a relic of the twentieth century, is a victim of that all-consuming affliction that pervaded the arts of that era, being *important*. In those days, pursuing the aesthetics of erotic beauty, the glories of nature, or the dictates of romance or realism meant nothing. To be artistic, you had to be a revolutionary, a rule breaker with a rebel vision, an innovator, a loner, and an original, one-and-only individualist who shocked and shook the world of art. Anything less and you were not important. Aware of this affliction and nauseated by it when it overcomes him, Silke has fought hard against it all his life.







Above: *After the Bath*, pencil and gouache on colored paper. Opposite: *Native American* based on several photos of Elke Sommer, ink and watercolor on paper. Private Collection.



But despite his life of protest, Silke is still afflicted. He can't help it. It's in his blood. Despite the fact that the only real money spent today is on vintage pin-up art done by artists who are all dead, despite the fact that the collectors who buy their work do so because it's kitsch, not art, Silke still holds the inane belief that trading in female beauty, in *bedtime babies*, *ding-dong girls* and *devil women* made of paper, is not only a valid profession, but one that can, if executed with passion and craftsmanship, actually have some artistic value.

As I've said, he's out of control.

To his credit, Silke doesn't include himself among those pin-up artists of value. But then how could he? He didn't have the "balls" to become a glamour artist until he was sixty-five and has only been at it for eight years. Nevertheless, Silke is persistent in his idea, and insisted that this book be titled, not simply *Pin-Up Art*, but *Pin-Up: The Illegitimate Art*. This is because he sees some nebulous connection, as you'll find out, between the *illegitimate theater* and girly art.

I suppose there is some similarity between the overt sexuality of burlesque, carnival, the commedia dell'arte, and pin-up art, and their appeal to the general public is also similar. Back in the twenties, thirties and forties, during the classic pin-up era, you didn't find calendar art in fashionable homes or avant-garde art galleries, but in blue collar workplaces such as auto garages and tire shops whose grease-stained mechanics went home to three-hundred-pound wives who went to bed every night wearing a head full of pink, plastic hair curlers. But to link pin-up art to popular theater today seems ludicrous. The general public has no interest in it, and there is no market for it, except for a very small, select group of buyers whose motives are, at best, suspect.

Consequently, to me it seems to be a giant waste of time exploring the possibility that "wink and titter" art has some hidden quality of redemption. But Silke insists I give it a try, so here we go. Why he insists, of course, is another story but I'll save that comedy for the next chapter.

If you get bored, just look at the pictures.



MIDNIGHT FROLICS

"My trouble is dames!"
—Milton Caniff in *Argosy* (1961)

Silke was born in 1931 in Pasadena, California, a small rural community struggling through the Depression, and as far away from the naughty, sophisticated world of female allure, and the profession of pin-up artist, as a child could get. The thirties were a chaste, puritan time in America. Most people believed that any trade in sex was restricted to the underworld of the forbidding big cities, and the polite society folks in Pasadena would never even consider using the word *sex*, let alone the possibility of trading in it. But social taboo wasn't the only reason the thought of spending his life drawing naked women was never going to occur to little Jimmie.

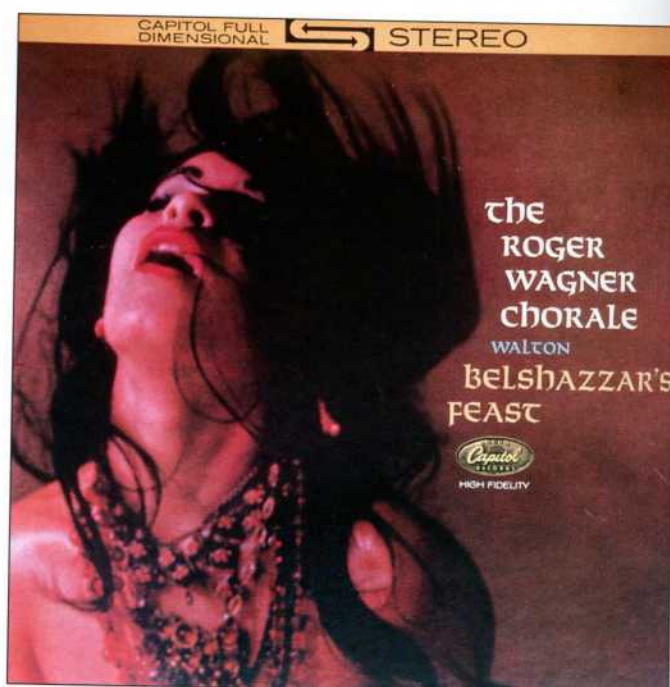
He was the son of a Baptist minister.

Now, before you get the wrong idea, I'm obliged to let him point something out. "My

father was a very unusual man. He wasn't some fanatic who wandered out into the desert, put his hand on a hot rock, and talked to God. He was a quiet, thoughtful, considerate, open-minded man of considerable wisdom and intellect. He had a Ph.D. in theology, but he wasn't a preacher. He was a Minister of Religious Education, which meant he ran the Sunday school and youth groups. His idea of a religious ministry was to be there for the members of his congregation, and to believe in them no matter how bad their troubles. He wasn't out to save the world or even to save souls. His job was to help people help themselves get through the day. And he did just that. As far as I was concerned, he made a decision very early that I could choose my path in life for myself and become whatever I wanted to become. He only spoke of it a few times, but it was always understood."

Silke, of course, didn't realize that this was a damn risky way to raise a boy afflicted with an incorrigible imagination and insatiable curiosity. But his father, aware of these afflictions as well as his child's serious stubborn streak, no doubt realized no other course made sense, and set him loose into the world of chance and adventure to find his own way. Trouble, naturally, was out there waiting for him.

For instance, Silke started school in Pasadena, California, which, in the early thirties, had just adopted a progressive educational system. That meant that every five-year-old entering kindergarten was allowed to pick the subject he or she wished to learn: spelling, arithmetic, reading, writing, or building the farm. Little Jimmie picked the farm. When the next choice period came, he



Some of the many pin-up style album covers art directed by Silke for Capitol Records. *Mood Latino*: modeled by Linda Harris, photographed by George Jerman. *Latin Lace*: Silke can't remember the models' names, but the girl in the mirror is not the one in front of it, as a vice president didn't think she looked Latin. *Burnished Brass*: modeled by the legendary Sandy Warner, photographed by Ken Veeder. *Belshazzar's Feast*: Silke took this photograph of the Artec

world that attracted me would eventually discard the quest for inner satisfaction which had dominated the arts, philosophies, and religions of the world, and replace it with the insatiable appetite for sensory stimulation which now pervades our culture. Back then, for me it was just one grand adventure. Everywhere I looked, the world was new."

Art school, of course, was where he first ran into serious trouble with the female.

His first class was figure drawing from the nude model. "One night we had a particularly

nubile model and I was determined to render her superb body perfectly. But then I became embarrassed on realizing I had given all my energy and interest to her breasts, so I timidly asked the instructor if I had made them too large. He studied my drawing for a while then politely asked me where her breasts were."

That happened in 1951. Silke was over forty years away from becoming a pin-up artist because he couldn't draw. He dropped out of Art Center School when he realized the instructors couldn't draw either, and studied with the legendary draftsman Herb Jepson.

"I followed him wherever he taught: his own Jepson Art Institute, Chouinard Art Institute, USC, Kahn Art Institute, and a couple other schools. But, I still couldn't draw."

Unknown to Silke, however, he wasn't that far away from trading in female flesh.

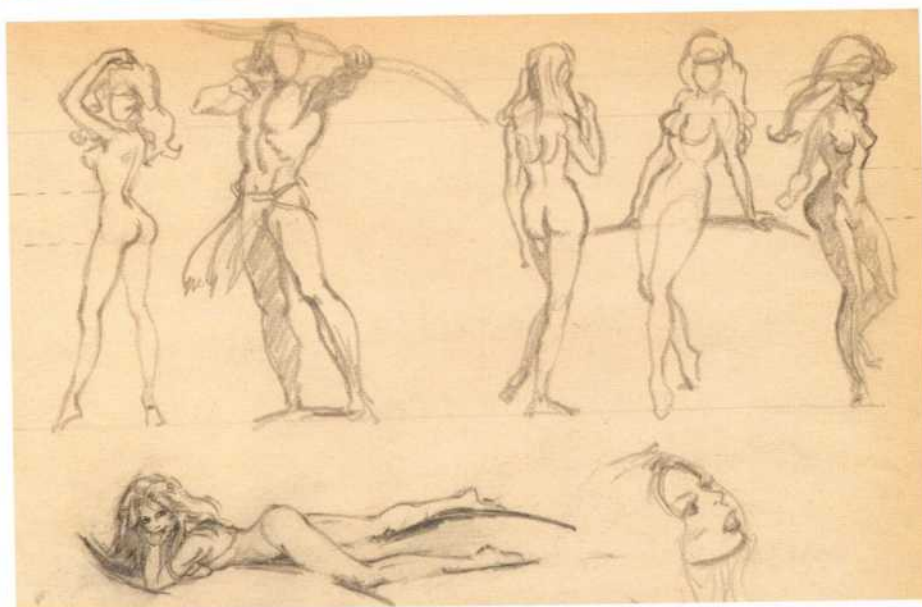
The Army drafted him out of art school and he spent two years painting nametags and training aids for the Cook School at Fort Ord, California. Evenings and weekends were spent taking the Famous Artists Advanced Program, a correspondence course taught

by the most respected illustrators of that time: Norman Rockwell, Robert Fawcett, Al Parker, Austin Briggs, Harold Von Schmidt, Jon Whitcomb, etc. On being discharged in 1955, he took his portfolio to every commercial art studio in Los Angeles, over thirty of them, and got turned down by all of them. He then tried the advertising agencies, going to over fifty before he found work as a gofer for the art director at Heintz Advertising. From there he moved around L.A. working as an art director for several small advertising agencies, and finally, in 1957, for Capitol Records where, to his surprise, he was asked to hire gorgeous models, costume them, and have them photographed for album covers. Without realizing it, he had jumped headfirst into the pin-up business.

In the fifties, even the commercial art world considered girl art *déclassé*. The lowest. But Silke never gave it a thought. He was in his element. "Most album covers in those days, like most paperback book covers, featured gorgeous ladies in revealing wardrobes and we did our best to hire Hollywood's most beautiful women, usually young actresses on their way up: Fay Spain, Mary Tyler Moore, Ziva Rodann, Sandy Warner, Linda Gray, Abby Dalton, and the city's best models, Dolores Grier, Nancy Nelson, Dolores Erickson, and many others. My favorites were actresses Yvette Mimieux and Victoria Vetri (a.k.a. Angela Dorian)."

During this time, he spent his nights photographing and drawing models in the hope of creating a comic strip, "Gladius," the story of a Roman gladiator. The heroine, Leto, he modeled after Brigitte Bardot. But he soon gave it up. "I just couldn't get Leto to behave on paper the way I wanted her to. She was never cute enough, or animated enough." What he's saying is that his drawing still wasn't good enough. He didn't, however, stop trying.

From 1957 to sometime in 1991, when he went to work full time on his graphic novel, *Rascals In Paradise*, Silke's career truly followed a path of chance and adventure. He worked as an art director, a magazine publisher, editor and designer, an illustrator, a record producer, glamour photographer, and as a costume designer, production designer, historian, novelist, and screenwriter. During all that time, he spent his late night hours drawing on small newsprint pads. His subjects were primarily women, Bettie Page, Diane Webber—the famous West Coast nude model, and Brigitte Bardot. He did it for fun. Those hours are what he now calls his *Midnight Frolics*.



His various careers, however, also prodded him along his accidental path to becoming a girl artist.

In 1961, while still the art director at Capitol Records, he began another kind of fun. He created, published, edited, and designed *Cinema* magazine, a bimonthly (when finances allowed) devoted to films and filmmakers. William Claxton, the celebrated jazz photographer, photographed the covers and feature articles on actresses. When Claxton became unavailable, Silke took over and that's how he became a glamour photographer. And, once again, he was in the

Top: Two pages of drawings of Brigitte Bardot taken from one of Silke's "Midnight Frolics" sketchbooks. **Bottom:** Silke's drawing of Spanish actress Teresa Del Rio in 1960; she was to be Neffer in his comic strip, the same character that later appeared in *Rascals In Paradise* (1995) and was based on Claudia Cardinale.



pin-up business, photographing the best of the rising young actresses: Barbara Parkins, Sharon Tate, Sue Ann Langdon, Anjanette Comer, Raquel Welch, Susan Seaforth, and dozens of others, as well as his favorites, Jackie Lane and Victoria Vetri, who you see on these pages. But indulging his talent and imagination in the flesh and fantasies of these beauties, as much as it was fun, was not the most fun.

Cinema gave Silke entrée to the most creative talents in the film industry, and he was able to meet and spend hours interviewing directors Robert Aldrich, Jean Renoir, Alfred Hitchcock, Fred Zinnemann, Richard Brooks, Akira Kurosawa, Georges Franju, Howard Hawks, and many of the other creative talents in Hollywood, including production designers such as Robert Boyle and the famed Italian costume designer Nino Novarese. And it was through the magazine that he met two of his closest friends, film directors George Stevens and Sam Peckinpah.

Both men shaped his aesthetic philosophy.

With Peckinpah, it was the work. His credo was, "Don't talk about it, do it!" which he delivered in an angry shout. He also had a second credo and Silke, with a chuckle in his voice, fondly recalls hearing it for the first time: "Columbia Pictures called me in a panic on a Tuesday, and on Thursday morning I was on an airplane flying to Mexico City. The costumes for *Major Dundee* were screwed up and my job was to fix them. From Mexico City, I flew to Durango, and at five the next morning they drove me to a little Indian village where the film was in its first week of shooting. I wasn't there ten minutes when, over a loudspeaker, came the assistant director's voice screaming, 'Silke, get your ass up here! Your department has fucked up!' I ran about three hundred yards to the courtyard of an old abandoned hacienda that was filled with milling extras and about two hundred mounted troopers, both Union and Confederate. They were in a column of twos, ready to ride out, and Sam was on the crane lining up the shot. I ran up to him and asked what the hell was wrong. He gave me his regulation glare, and growled, 'Don't bring me questions, bring me answers!'"

The problem was a pennant flag that was to represent the Confederate unit. Silke had made it back in Hollywood, and done a neat, professional job. But if he had read the



Opposite: Victoria Vetri (a.k.a. Angela Dorian) photographed by Silke for his comic strip and eventually featured in *Cinema* magazine (1965).
Top: Bettie Page sketchbook drawing, pencil on newsprint, done in the sixties. Bottom: Diane Webber sketchbook drawing, pencil on newsprint, done in the sixties.



script carefully, he would have discovered that the flag was to have been made by the Confederate prisoners from a piece of cloth torn off a uniform. Discovering his mistake, Silke tore a piece off of actor John Davis Chandler's uniform and he and Chandler made the flag, finishing about thirty seconds before the first shot.

That's how Silke's film career started, by designing costumes for *Major Dundee*, which he also did in the coming years for *The Wild Bunch*, *Pat Garrett and Billy the Kid*, and others. About a year after *Major Dundee*, he went under contract to Peckinpah as a writer. That meant twenty pages a day, seven days a week, a lot of three A.M. phone calls, and a whole lot of coffee.

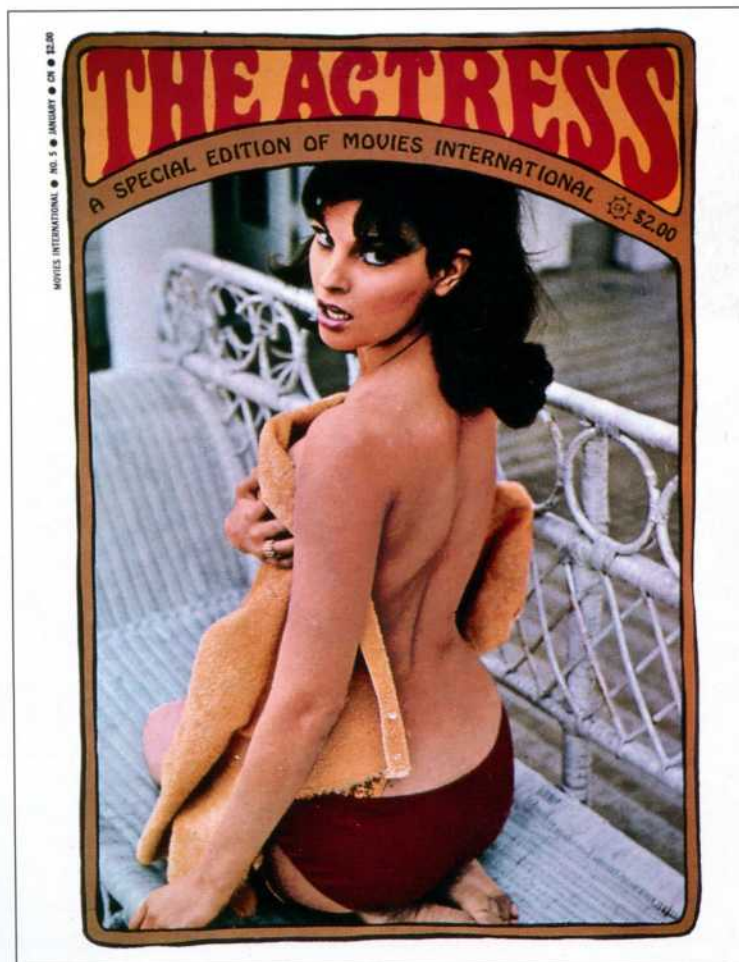
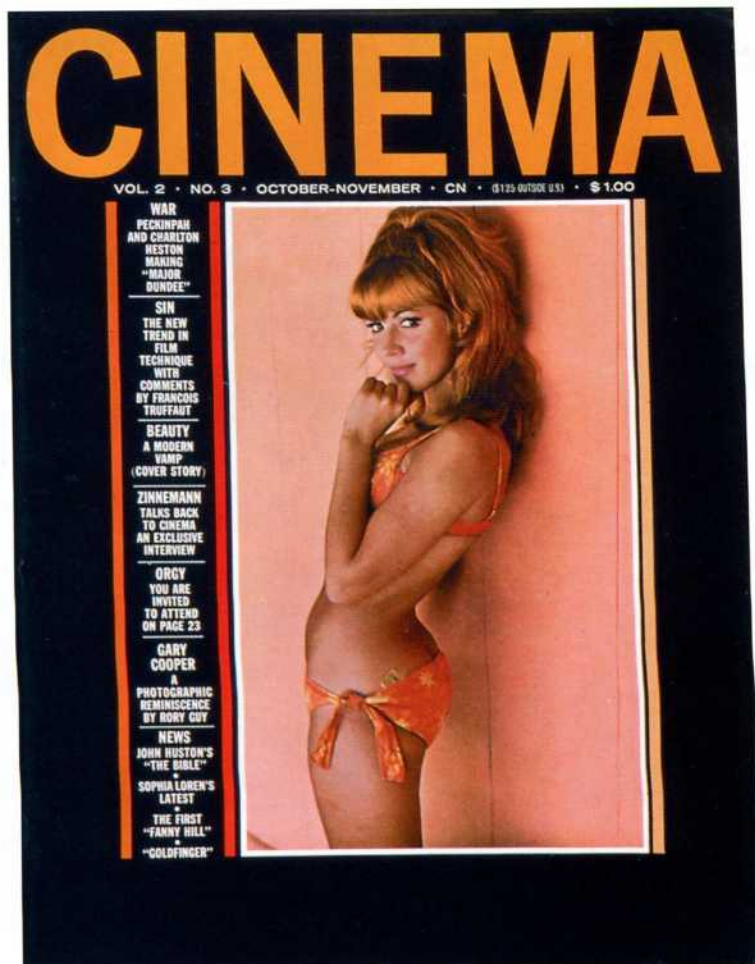
"There were also parties with our families on holidays and weekends, parties that were more like fiestas. But mostly it was constant writing, each script a daily and nightly search for the story, and especially for the characters. More often than not, both our heroes and villains were heavies. Bad guys. And the questions were always the same. Who were they deep inside? Where was their bottom line? Where was their pride? Their sense of worth? It was a search for some kind of quality of redemption. Sam finally put it all together in *The Wild Bunch*. As bad as they were, the bunch shared the kind of loyalty to each other that, along with an innate vitality and daring, settled the American West. That was their quality of redemption, that and the laughter of the strong."

You can easily see from the above why we couldn't let Silke write this book. Give him a chance and he'll keep talking like that, then start quoting Raymond Chandler, "But down these mean streets a man must go who is not himself mean..." then Dashiell Hammett, Graves, Robert Browning, Marlene Dietrich, Chester Himes, and all his other favorites. As if their aesthetic philosophies have something to do with why he likes to paint nubile nymphs wearing a splash of suntan oil.

Silke did do some photographic pin-ups of Peckinpah's gorgeous, hoyden of a wife, Begonia Palacios. Peckinpah married her three times, and Silke was best man twice.

What Silke learned from Peckinpah was the intensity of focus and the amount of energy and time required to do anything in the creative world well, to be a professional.

Opposite: Jackie Lane, photographed by Silke for Cinema magazine in 1964. Top: Jackie Lane, photographed by Silke for the cover of Cinema in 1964. Bottom: Raquel Welch, photographed by Silke for The Actress, a special edition of Movies International in 1968.



From 1955 to 1995 when *Rascals in Paradise* was published, the only artwork consistently produced by Silke was for family Christmas cards such as this one done in the seventies. The models are his daughter Tarylee Silke and her collection of stuffed animals.



One of the many costume sketches done for Sam Peckinpah's film *Major Dundee* (1965). Pencil and oil pastel on paper.



And, being diametrically opposite personalities, they depended on each other. Silke is a defiant romantic with a hardcore realist underpinning. Peckinpah is a defiant realist with a hardcore romantic underpinning.

With George Stevens (*Gunga Din*, *The More the Merrier*, *A Place In the Sun*, *Shane*, *Giant*, *The Diary of Anne Frank*), Silke was shaped by their conversations. "I read scripts and books for him—*Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid*, *The Stalking Moon*, *The Secret of Santa Vittoria*, and a number of others—but never worked for him. We did plan a film based on Rudyard Kipling's poems, which we alternately titled *Guns and Drums* and *Drums and Guns*. But it was more for the fun of discussing Kipling than actually making a film. We had breakfasts, lunches, and dinners together, went to the movies together, and just sat in his apartment, or drove around old Hollywood so he could show me where he shot the Laurel and Hardy short films, where his first job was, etc. We talked about everything, not just the movies he had made, but war, philosophy, poetry, and Kipling, always Kipling. We never argued, but we often didn't agree, so we would discuss the differences in a slow probing of each other's minds. And I mean slow. As director Jack Ford once said to me, 'You know Geooooorge! He calls you up, gives you a five-minute monologue—and uses four words.'"



Silke and Stevens discussed all kinds of ideas; storytelling is a trip on which you must get lost in order to find your way; without chaos within you, you will never catch a shooting star; the source of beauty



is a wound; the only way to win is to lose; beauty begins where analysis ends, and on and on. And Silke is convinced that all these ideas have something to do with his choice of frivolous, sexy *sugar babies* as his subject matter, and how he stages, costumes, and paints them. In short, his time with Stevens and Peckinpah indirectly led him to trade in beautiful flesh. But he's very vague as to just how that happened.

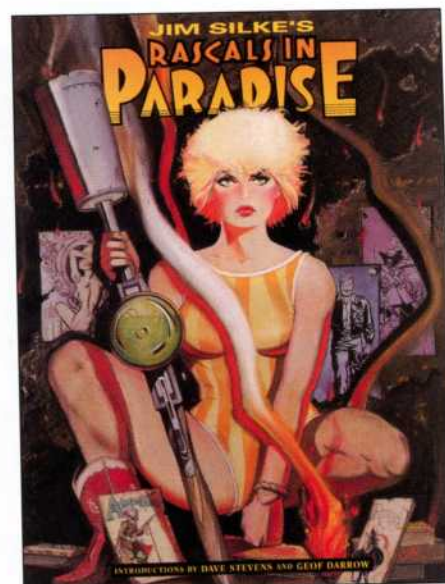
The reality, of course, is quite different. When Silke finally learned to draw well enough to produce *Rascals In Paradise* and *Bettie Page: Queen of Hearts*, he set up a booth at the San Diego Comic Convention to sell his work. But the only thing people wanted to buy were his drawings of beautiful women. So he did more, sold them, and "presto," he's a pin-up artist.

Money, folks, that's the bottom line.

But there is something to what Silke claims. There has always been a tension in his life between his childhood morality and his adult dreams and profession. He was, like almost everyone else of his generation, taught that girly art was dangerous filth that would take his mind off his homework, church, even basketball, and lead him astray. Well, he not only went astray but also, at least from some people's point of view, has gone in the

opposite direction in life than his father did. That's probably why, along with the affliction of being important, he'd like to think there might be some quality of redemption in his work. That's not likely, as you'll see, but he did find out something basic about himself from his discussions of Kipling with George Stevens.

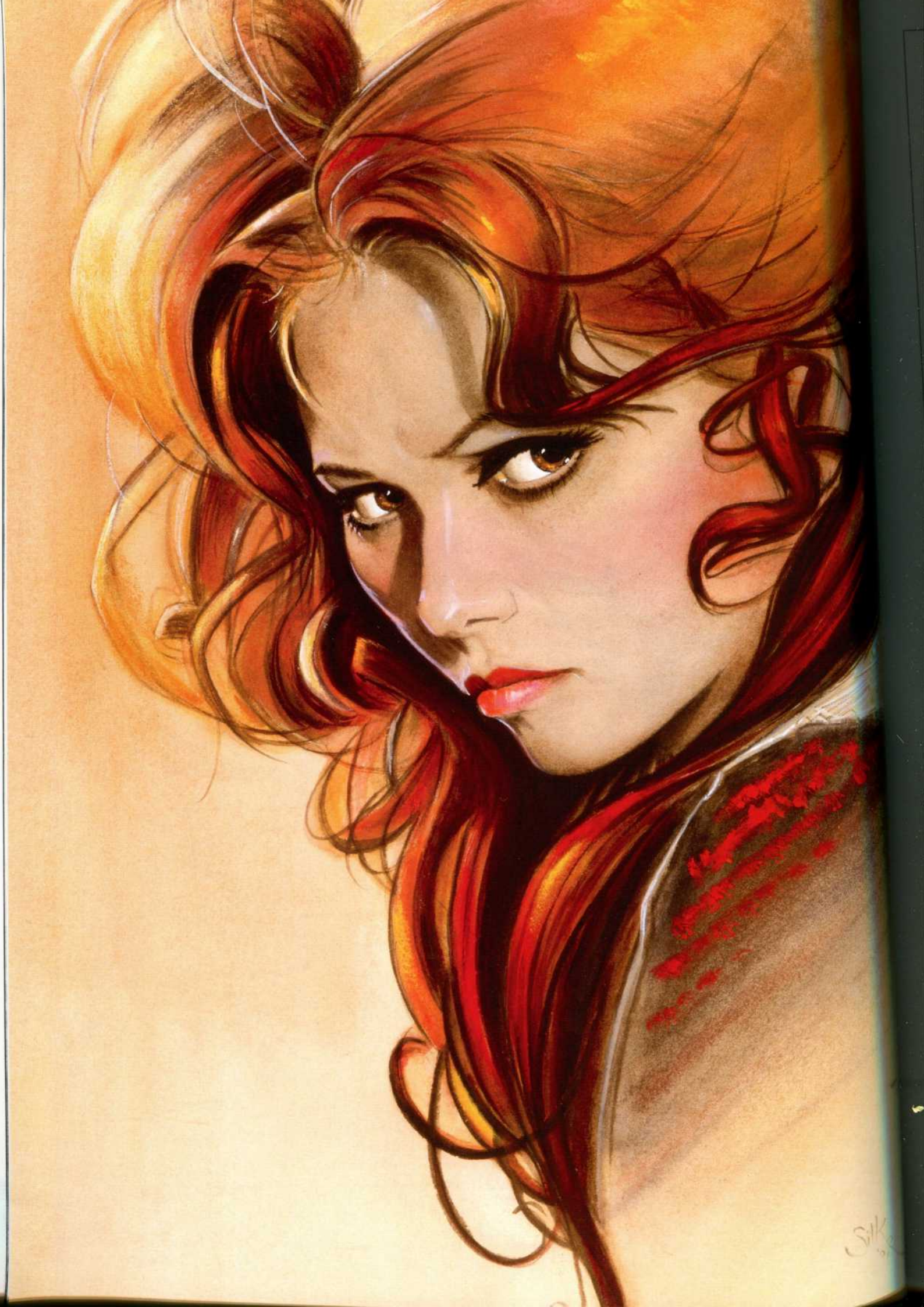
Rudyard Kipling based his philosophy on ancient Hindu beliefs. For the poet, it was the planting and tilling of the garden that was important, not the blossoming of the rose. The goal in life is not at the end of the trail, but in the traveling of the trail, in the sheer joy of just doing it, of living, and exulting in the work, in the toil of life. Silke, while talking with Stevens, came to understand this, and realized that in his own way he has always adhered to it, if not by intellect then by instinct.



His *Midnight Frolics* are not a myth. He's done hundreds and hundreds of drawings, the great majority of them of women that no one has seen but him. And today, when he knows that he can sell every *Vampirella* drawing he makes, he is still just as likely to draw Olive Borden, Lily Damita, or some other lovely you have probably never heard of.

More than the money, Silke enjoys the work, the simple doing of it; photographing the model, selecting the paper, the slide of the graphite pencil over it, and most of all, picking the girl.

Above: Silke's cover for *Bettie Page: Queen Of Hearts* (1995). Private Collection. Middle: A page from *Rascals In Paradise* (1995) featuring Dorem "Spicy" Saunders, a character based on Brigitte Bardot but with a hairstyle and attitude influenced by Madonna. Right: Silke's cover for *Rascals In Paradise* (1995). Private Collection.





LES GIRLS

*Age can not wither her, nor custom stale
Her infinite variety. Other women cloy
The appetites they feed, but she makes hungry
Where most she satisfies.*

—Shakespeare / *Antony & Cleopatra* (1490)

I admit that quoting William Shakespeare in a book determined to wallow in the lowdown and profane world of *hot tomatoes* and *bare naked ladies* is pretentious. But I'm not comparing the Bard's artistry to the art of the pin-up. I'm simply trying to make a point about the women Silke draws, and how his artwork is more about his models than about him. So bear with me.

First of all, I have to remind you that Cleopatra was real. She had to scrub her teeth, bathe, put on body makeup, and cope with her teenage appetites just like Beyoncé or your sister. Plus, she had real problems. At sixteen, she became Pharaoh of Egypt and had to marry her pimple-faced wimp of a brother. Nevertheless, she beguiled, seduced, and manipulated the two

most powerful men in the ancient world, Julius Caesar and Mark Antony.

Scores of plays, paintings, motion pictures, novels, poems, songs, burlesque routines, and even comic books have used her as the principal subject, each portraying her in the most lascivious, enticing, and deadly ways possible. Shakespeare's description of her, however, set the standard by which we judge, not only Cleopatra, but also every femme fatale.

But Shakespeare never met her. He made her up.

Nevertheless, the Bard based her on somebody. He had a model. A serving wench, working girl, slumming aristocrat, whatever. He had somebody, and I'm sure

that Silke, for one, would love to have met her.

Every artist telling a story about or creating an image of a human being, whether with artwork, writing, music, dance, or sculpture needs a model to work from. I know that there are those who believe some artists work entirely from their imagination, but the actuality is this: those artists have an almost photographic visual memory as well as a vivid imagination and, as they draw, the two come together. When that occurs, the style of the artist dominates the end result.

But in pin-up art, the model must dominate, must be the essential ingredient. Not the artist.

The model is the subject of the picture.



Anna Mae Wong in, from top to bottom, *The Daughter of the Dragon* (1931), *The Chinese Parrot* (1927), *Shanghai Express* (1932). Ink, watercolor, and gouache on paper.

The story is her story. Not only does she dominate the image, she is the image. No matter how you design the shapes and colors, or stage and costume her, the girl is always, must always, be the center of interest.

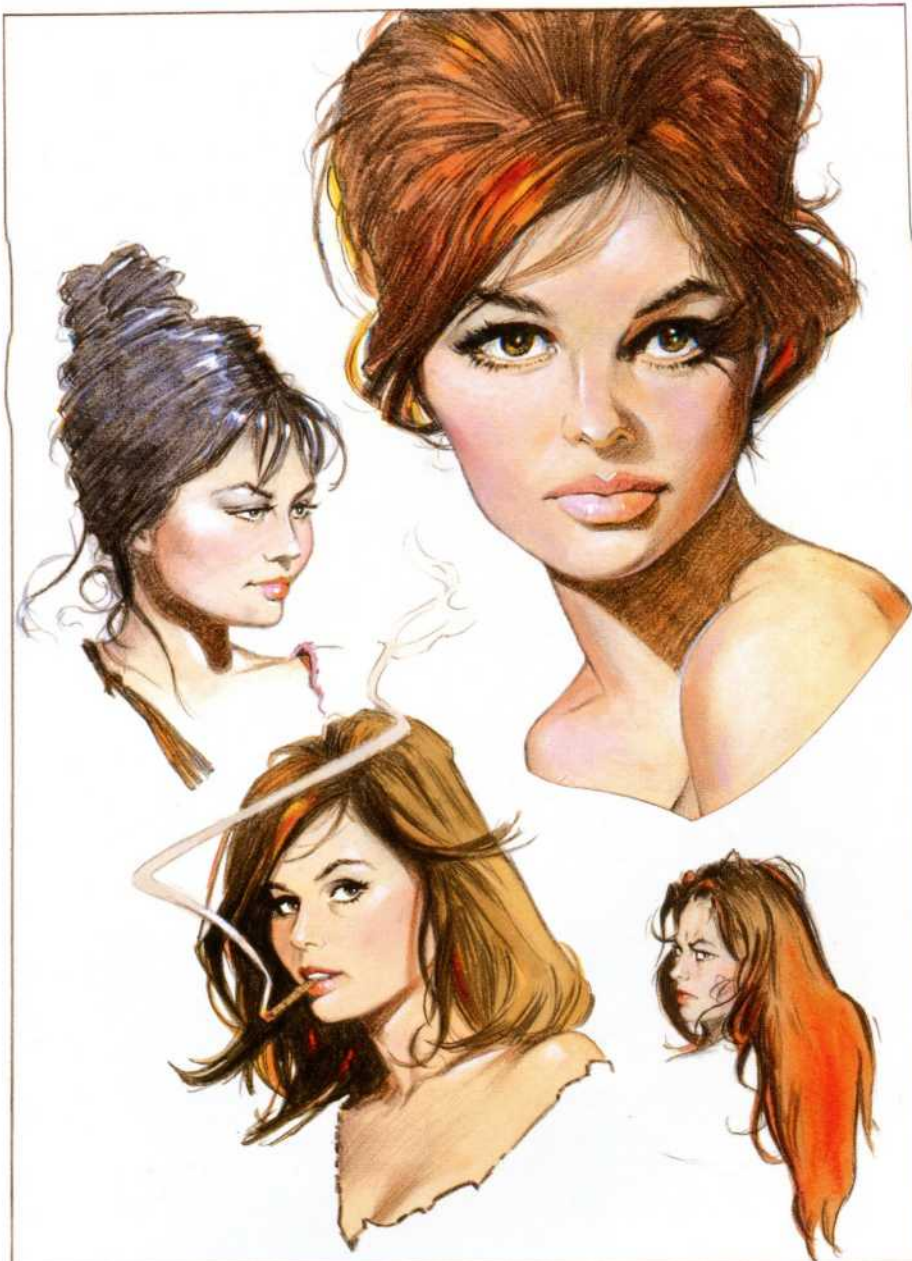
That's what Silke understands, and that is why he became a glamour artist. It is the girl that charms him, not the brush strokes, color, design, or composition. And it is the girl who is supposed to charm the viewer. In pin-up terms, that means appeal to your baser instincts. Turn you on.

Silke first learned this from his long-time friend Frank Frazetta who he considers one of the finest draftsmen of the twentieth century. "One of the times I stayed with the Frazettas in Sheepshead Bay, I showed Frank a drawing of a girl I'd done and his reaction surprised me. Instead of commenting on all the things I was worried about, the drawing, composition, design, etc., he just grinned with male pleasure and exclaimed, 'Yeah! She's cute!'"

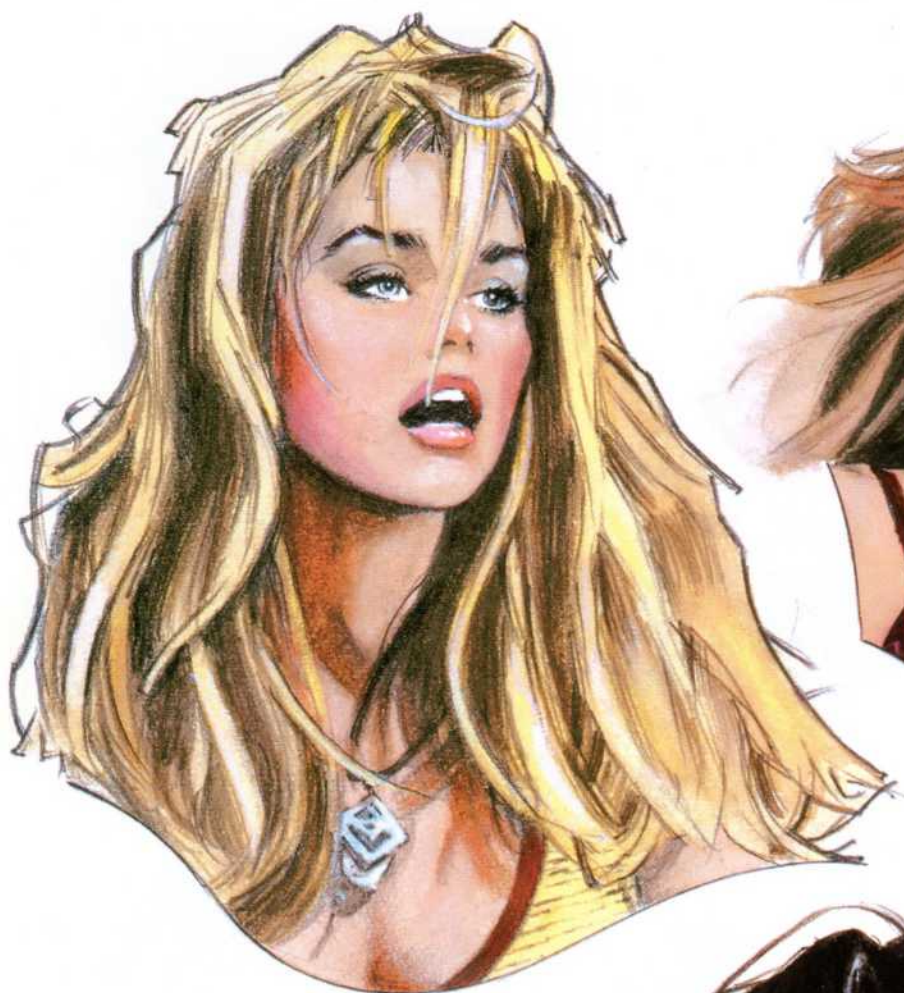
That was the moment Silke realized that whatever talent and craft he had were simply a means to an end, and that end was to titillate, enchant, delight, and charm the viewer. He also understood that no pin-up artist is going to charm anyone unless he or she has been charmed. Consequently, for Silke, the first and most essential task in glamour art is picking the model.

Looking back at the history of girl art, you'll find that the artists almost always had a type of girl which they preferred, and which they repeated over and over again, only changing her when popular fashion demanded it. The two who are the most collectable today are an example. Alberto Vargas, in his foldouts for *Esquire* magazine, preferred upper-class lovelies with ladylike attitudes and wearing the latest fashions. He took his models from the chorus lines of the *Ziegfeld Follies* and the chic nightclubs of Manhattan. On the other hand, Gillette Elvgren, one of Brown & Bigelow's most popular calendar artists, used corn-fed beauties of the Midwest who flaunted their joyous sexuality while having their clothing partially removed by freak accidents and acts of nature.

Today, in the small, free-wheeling, open-minded world of glamour art, the artist can choose a model of any color, shape, attitude, or social strata he or she wants; lady, bimbo,



Top: Studies of Claudia Cardinale from various films and publicity photographs. Ink, watercolor, gouache, and pastel on paper. Bottom: Silke's daughter Tarylee Silke posing as James Lowell Stringfellow for *Razzle in Paradise*. Tarylee has posed for her father more than any other model, as she is such a good actress that she can take both female and male roles. Pencil on newsprint.



queen, tramp, booty babe, saint, girl-next-door, virgin, whore, or wife. Silke loves them all, particularly the wife. But when he starts a drawing he gets very particular. He believes the qualities he looks for in a model have something to do with his preference for the rude aesthetics of the illegitimate theater. Well, maybe. But the essential quality he looks for first came to him when film director Howard Hawks (*Red River*, *Rio Bravo*, *Bringing Up Baby*, *The Big Sleep*, etc.) told him a story about actress Carole Lombard.

Hawks: "Lombard was one of the most attractive girls you could find. And she acted like a schoolgirl. And she was stiff; she would try and imagine a character and then act according to her imagining instead of being herself. The film was *Twentieth Century*. We were rehearsing the first day, and John Barrymore began to hold his nose. I made him promise that he wouldn't say anything until three o'clock in the afternoon, but I could see him getting worried. Well, I took Lombard for a walk around the stage and I said, 'You've been working hard on the script.' She said, 'I'm glad it shows.' And I said, 'Yes, you know every word of it. How much do you get paid for the picture?' She told me. I said, 'That's pretty good. What do you get paid for?' She said, 'Well, acting.' I said, 'Well, what if I would tell you that you had earned all your money, and you don't have to act anymore?' She just stared at me, and I said, 'What would you do if a man said such and such a thing to you?' She said, 'I'd kick him right in the balls.' And I said, 'Well, Barrymore said that to you. Why didn't you kick him? What would you say if a man said such and such to you?' And she whinnag-snarled, you know, with one of those Lombard gestures. I said, 'Well, he said that to you when he said such and such a line. Now, you're going back in and make the scene, and you kick him, and you do any damn thing that comes to your mind that's natural, and quit acting. If you don't quit, I'm going to fire you this afternoon.' She said, 'All right.' She became a star after this picture. And she used to send me a wire every time she started a picture saying, 'I'm going to kick him right in the balls.'"

It's that kind of emotional honesty that Silke looks for in a model, and that he encourages in them. "It's the personality of the model that traps my eye, and that I hope to capture on paper. The model's character as well as her physical beauty. Her vitality, joy, anger.



Howard Hawks (top left), Laetitia Casta (top right), and two other models. He and watercolor on paper. Top: Olive Borden, pencil on paper. Bottom: Lisa Marie Scott, pencil on colored paper. For more on the two Bare Naked Ladies on page 67.

Dolores Del Rio in, clockwise from top left, *Revenge* (1929), *Salome* (1929), *The Bad One* (1930), and *Bird of Paradise* (1932) in watercolor, and gouache on paper. Private Collection.



And her attitude, defiant, vulnerable, coy, clever, dangerous."

The habits he formed during years of writing motion pictures, novels, and comic books also determine his choices. In short, he picks a model as if he were casting an adventure story. He wants the viewer to ask, "Who is she? What's about to happen to her? Will she survive?"

I am certain that the deep-seated reason behind this preference comes from the influence of Milton Caniff's characters, the Dragon Lady and Burma. They initiated Silke's unsuspecting imagination into the luring delights of dangerous ladies in tropical climes. Cartoonist Jules Feiffer said it best when he pointed out that Caniff drew women, not girls, and that fact undoubtedly made them the preeminent attraction of Silke's virgin youth. As Feiffer noted, "... even the eleven-year-old suspected—that a man—say, a very young man—could spend the night and that Burma would please him beyond his wildest dreams and that the Dragon Lady would please herself."

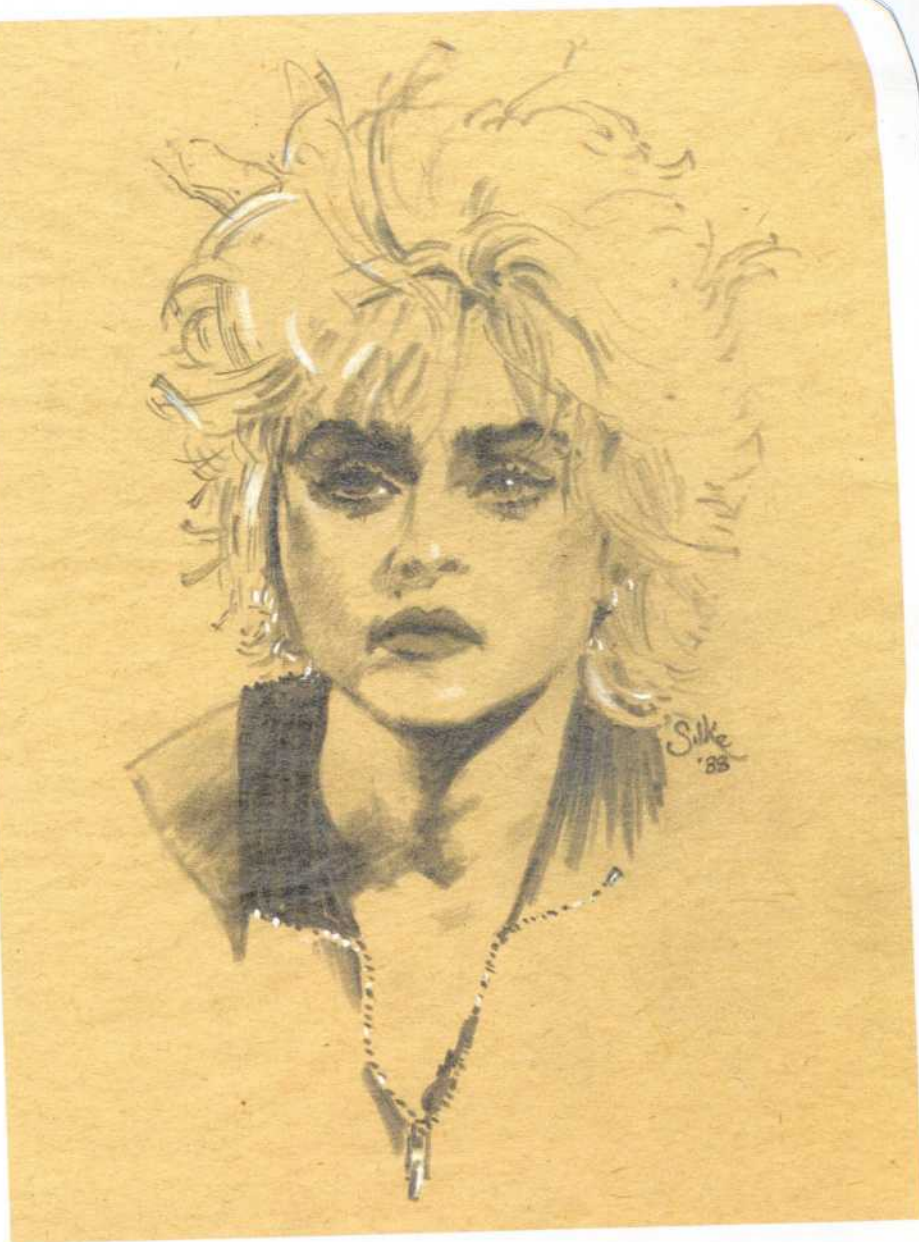
Silke puts it another way. "Vulnerable chicks are swell, but there's something about a full-grown woman that gets to me. It's all that experience and loss of innocence. All the heat, fire, and smoke in her eyes. And the danger. You just know that somebody's gonna get hurt and, hopefully, it'll be you."

That point of view again shows Kipling's effect on the young Silke, and this time I know precisely where it originated, a stanza from Kipling's poem, "The Ladies."

Then we was shifted to Neemuch
(Or I might ha' been keepin' 'er now),
An' I took with a shiny she-devil,
The wife of a nigger at Mhow;
Taught me the gipsy-folks' *boleee*;
Kind o' volcano she were,
For she knifed me one night 'cause I
wished she was white,
And I learned about women from 'er!

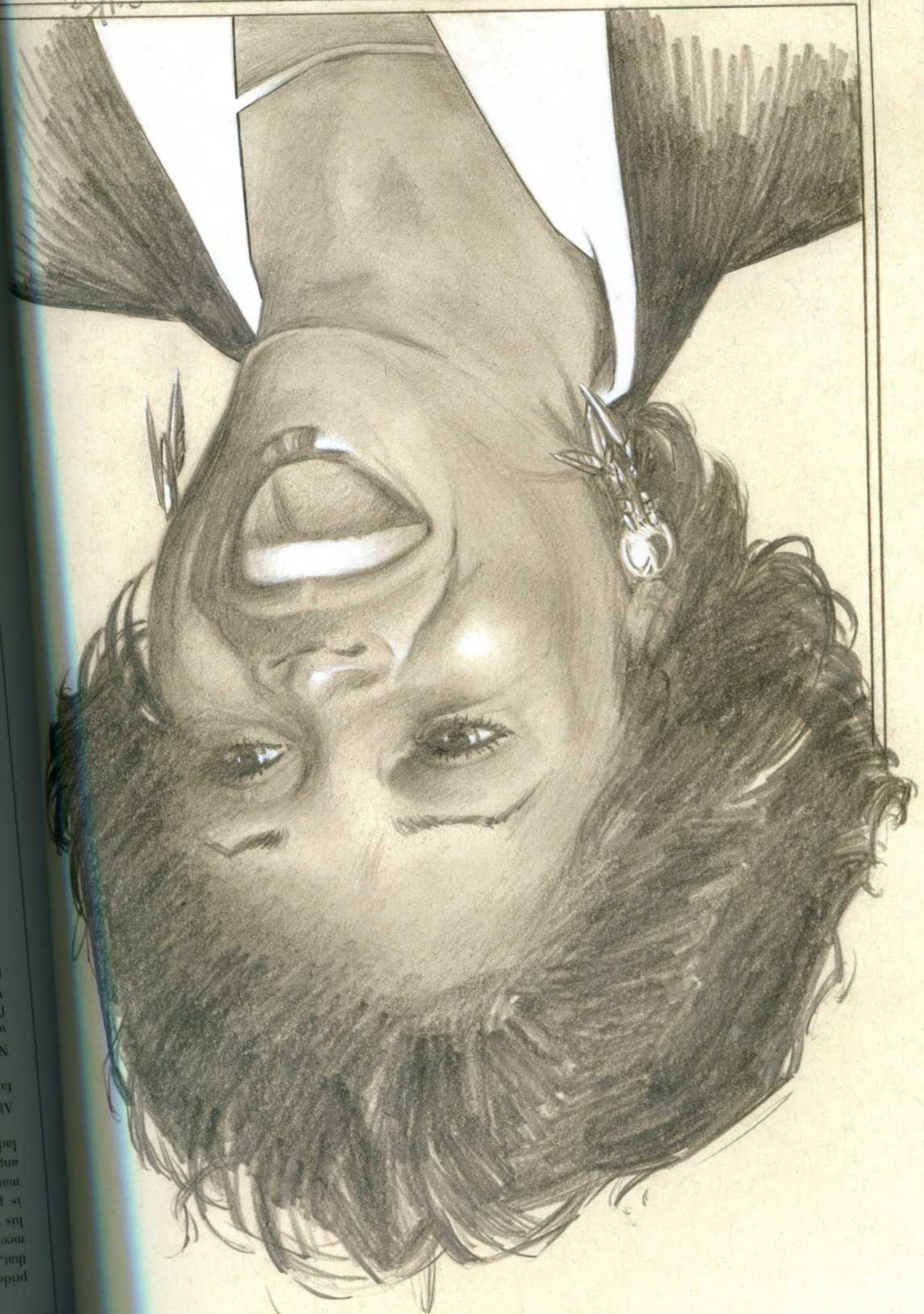
Today, we condemn the poet for using the "n" word, but at the same time we have to recognize that, long before the rest of the white world, Kipling understood his own prejudice as well as the justified anger of the black woman.

"Ever since high school, when I first read that poem, I daydreamed about meeting and knowing a beauty with that kind of anger,



Top: Madonna, pencil and white chalk on newsprint. This drawing changed Silke's concept of female glamour, see text. Bottom: Clara Bow, pencil on newsprint.

Silk
8/2



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pride of race, and courage." Silke may say that, but he never actually believed he would meet a woman like that. Nevertheless, in his world of chance and adventure anything is possible, and on October 7, 2000, he married Kurtesa—a woman whose spirit and anger, as you'll see, is very much like the lady in the poem.

All of this chitchat brings me to Silke's favorite model, Claudia Cardinale.

Now, don't let your imaginations run away with you. This gorgeous actress does not fly all the way from Rome to pose in his Woodland Hills studio. If she did, I'm sure he couldn't handle it. But she's never been there and is not on her way, so he's safe. He works from photographs of her and from her films, particularly *Once Upon A Time In The West*, *Cartouche*, and *The Leopard*. It's a tad pretentious of him to call her his model, but that's how he sees it.

"I first drew Claudia when casting the part of Neffer in my comic book, *Rascals In Paradise*. Neffer is a living replica of an ancient, savage, Phoenician priestess. She's in heat, bloodthirsty, an instinctive animal that is totally alive and desirable and dangerous. I initially tried to use other actresses in the part, Dolores Del Rio, Anna Mae Wong, Joan Crawford (because Caniff had used her as the model for the *Dragon Lady*). But Claudia was the only one I could believe as a savage animal."

When he finished *Rascals*, he just kept drawing Claudia and is still at it because, like Cleopatra, for Silke she makes hungry where most she satisfies.

His casting of Brigitte Bardot as Doreen "Spicy" Saunders in *Rascals*, had a different intention. Spicy, like Bardot, is enigmatic in her expression, and completely indifferent to her beauty, both clothed and nude. She's a mystery to the male characters, each one imposing on her their male vision of whom she is. As Silke points out, "None of the guys get Spicy right, anymore than I get completely right the girls I draw. Men never have and never will get to the heart of the female mystery. It's not going to happen. That's why it is so important to work from real people, that way you have a chance of getting close. The right model will not only arouse and inspire you, but also inform and instruct you, and keep you real."

Bettie Page first taught Silke that lesson back in the fifties. As he pointed out in his book, *Bettie Page, Queen of Hearts*, he drew her a lot back then when he was studying the female anatomy because Bettie's anatomy was so well defined. But in drawing her over and over, he eventually came to see that her main attraction was her attitude, her animated joy, her personality and character. "They were as important, actually more important, than her physical perfection."

In 1988, Madonna also woke him up. His sketch of her included in this book (page 29) is not one of his best, nor is it a very good likeness of the singer. Nevertheless, it is important to him because a lot of his assumptions about female beauty, glamour, and style changed as he did it.

"I was trained as an artist to let the subject control not only the emotion with which I approach it, but the rhythm of my pencil stroke, and its force, whether timid, strong, or otherwise, thus allowing my imagination and senses to enter my subject's world. That is why I work in silence rather than with music, and why it is so difficult to draw in public at conventions. As a consequence, when drawing Madonna I found there was no flow to her hair; it was more like drawing spikes or nails. The same feeling carried into the stabbing strokes when I drew in the stink-eye blacks of her eye sockets, and the jagged edge of the zipper. Her mole became emphasized, and I boldly drew in her Adam's apple. I didn't hint at it, but drew the whole damn thing. Madonna, no doubt, was aware of this emphasis when designing her makeup, hair, and wardrobe, and there are millions of teenage girls that also, obviously, understand it as they imitate her religiously. But it was all brand new to me. And it was right."

For those of you unaware of the short history of the pin-up trade, I must point out that there are simply no Adam's apples in girl art. None. Not in Kirchner, Vargas, Armstrong, Petty, Bolles, Elvgren, etc. But there are now.

Silke's point is simply this, whether you're a genius like Shakespeare creating a classic femme fatale such as Cleopatra, or a starving freelance cartoonist drawing a hot tomato for the cover of an air freshener, you learn from the model, not only of the new styles in fashion and social behavior, but of the nature of the female.

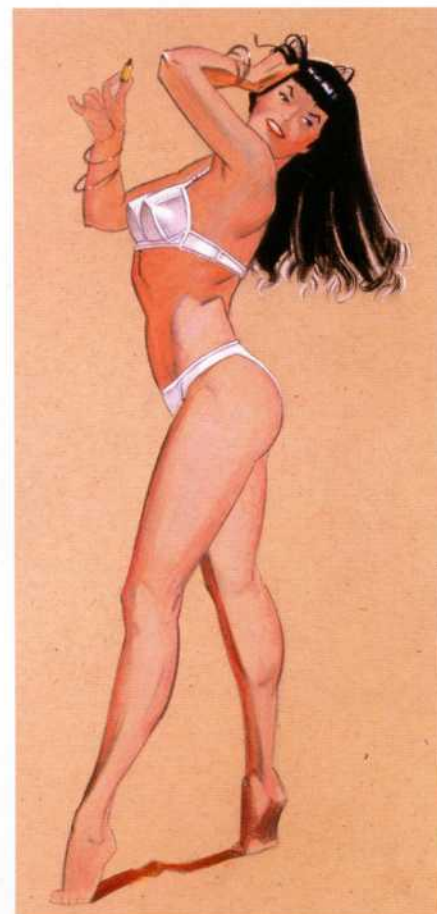
Unfortunately for Silke, the lessons are sometimes a bit more blunt than those Madonna taught him. "When I made the drawing of my wife Kurtesa, (page 30), I confronted a problem of considerable dimensions. At that time, I only had about

ten or twelve hours' experience drawing black women, and over fifty years' experience drawing white women. That meant that I was an amateur again as there are distinctly different problems, despite the politically correct police who don't want you to mention it, between rendering a white and black woman; the value range is closer, the hair texture is different, and the structure of the lips, nose, and body are, in general, different, to say nothing of the particular differences of the individual. Then there was the emotional problem: I was courting her at the time.

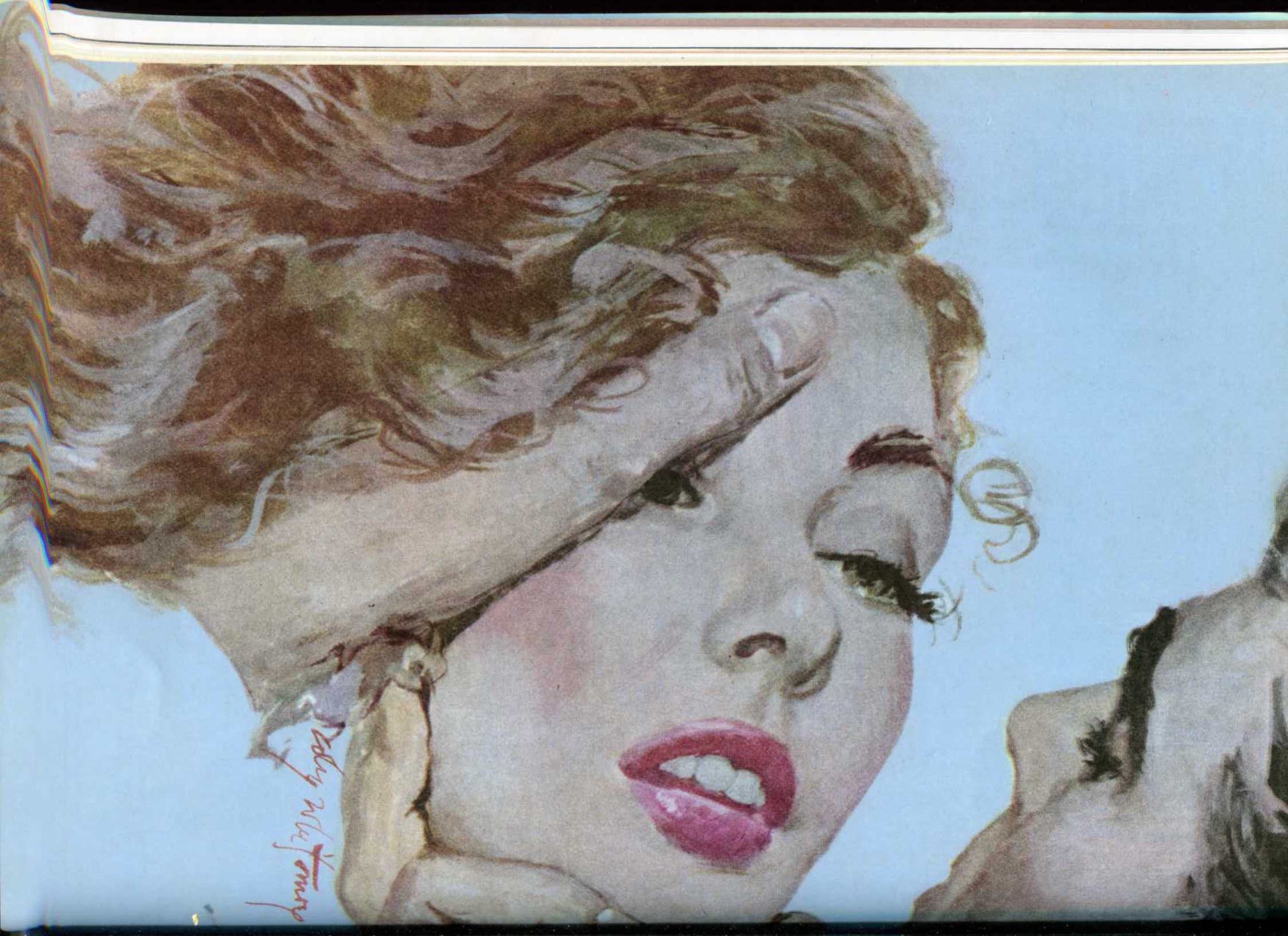
"In short, my concentration and focus were intense as I did the drawing. What I was shooting for was her animation and vitality, and I think I got it. I was afraid to paint the drawing, however, and still am, as my pencil is a lot more skilled than my brush."

His wife Kurtesa, to Silke's delight, was not offended by the drawing; she even liked it a little. So, filled with the euphoria of his minor success, Silke proceeded in his mindless, academic manner to explain to her how, while she was beautiful, she was not a conventional glamour girl. To his shock and surprise, her reply was a sudden, sharp blow upside his head.

And, as Kipling would say, he learned about women from her.



Opposite: Kurtesa Clarke-Silke, pencil and white chalk on newsprint.
 Above: Bettie Page, rough drawing for a panel in
 Bettie Page: Queen of the Nile. Pencil and gouache on colored paper.
 Above: Bettie Page.





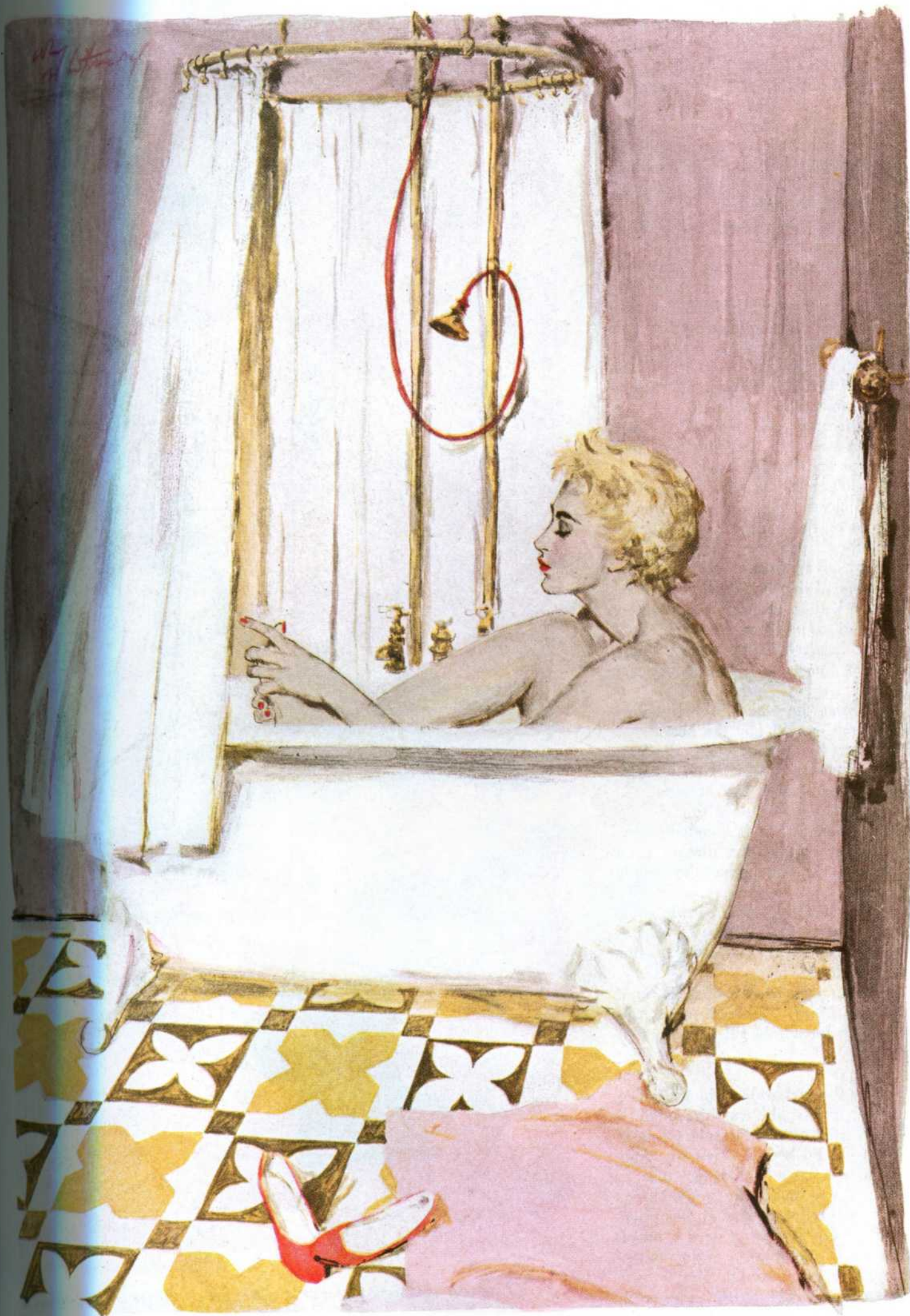
this kind of boyish stupidity, waited patiently until he found his wits and told her where Mr. Kemp's office was. Jimmie Boy watched her move off, and then covertly followed her as she crossed the empty theater, passed through the main lobby, and climbed the staircase to the balcony lobby where the producer's office was located. Slowly ascending the staircase, he stopped short of the landing with his eyes at the level of the balcony floor so he could study her as she spoke to the secretary, then sat down and waited. Silke recalls, "It was like looking at an object of art, and it absolutely confounded me."

His confusion did not come from meeting a celebrity. Silke was used to that. He had met all the superstars mentioned above, as well as Red Skelton, Dinah Shore, Rise Stevens, and Errol Flynn, and had spent an entire afternoon racing around Hollywood trying to find Marilyn Monroe a chicken salad sandwich. He'd also met the most beautiful dancing girls in Hollywood, Larri Thomas, Julie Newmar, Peggy Gordon, June Mahoney, and his reaction to them is what you might expect, a very active, if awkward, sexual attraction. But Hedy Lamarr totally unnerved him. "I had no sexual response to her whatsoever. Her aesthetic beauty awed and consumed me. It simply overwhelmed my senses and emotions, and I couldn't stop looking at her. The only other times I've reacted like that were on viewing Michelangelo's *Pieta* and Edgar Degas's *Dancers In the Wings*. But this was the first time I'd been moved to that degree, and I was determined to study her until I discovered just how she, or Mother Nature, had managed to make her so beautiful."

Hedy Lamarr, of course, disappeared into the producer's office before her magic revealed itself to our young clown. Now you would think if he was that impressed, that he'd have considered going into the movie business, as a costume designer or art director, something that he actually would do ten years in the future, but that never occurred to him. Instead, it pushed him into the decision to become a slick women's magazine illustrator.

Left: Illustration by Coby Whitmore for *The Ladies Home Journal*. Copyright 1953 *The Ladies Home Journal*. **Opposite:** Illustration by Coby Whitmore for *Cosmopolitan* in the late 1950s.

Coby Whitmore







"I had this sudden hunger to draw beautiful women, and the only artist I knew of that painted movie stars at that time was Jon Whitcomb. Every month *Cosmopolitan* featured a drawing by Whitcomb of a female star, and he'd also done some movie star covers for the magazine, one featuring Brigitte Bardot and another with Mylène Demongeot. And when Whitcomb wasn't painting a movie star, he was working with the most beautiful models in New York. All those artists were. And you could tell from their work that they were having one hell of a good time. In those magazines, the artist is director, producer, costume designer, prop master, set decorator, and casting director as well as the artist. I figured it must be an adult way of playing with paper dolls or, better yet, making your own paper dolls."

This was Silke's first conscious attempt at becoming a girl artist. But the field he picked was way too respectable for someone with his libido and love of the lowdown, profane and commonplace. "There were no nudes to

speak of in the women's magazine, no sight of any lingerie, not even an exposed bra strap. And the stories were banal, without a hint of poverty, hard times, filth, horror, violence, or pain. And no sex. None." As Jon Whitcomb pointed out, in America, love in the women's publications stopped at the courtship.

Silke diligently set to work trying to draw stylish people, clothes, furnishings, cars, and restaurants. To keep up with the latest styles in shoes, jewelry, dresses, hairstyles, and lipsticks, he built a scrap file following the organizational chart in Al Parker's course in the Famous Artists Advanced Program. But eventually, his passion waned. "All the characters in those stories were living the American Good Life, and there wasn't a single short girl in the crowd, let alone a brown-skinned lovely. There was nothing commonplace whatsoever in the stories or artwork, except for the mandatory broken heart."

What Silke eventually found out was this: the bedrooms, restaurants, cars, and women

the women's illustrators put on paper were identical to the bedrooms they lived in, the restaurants they ate in, the cars they drove, and the women they romanced. The artists represented on these pages had an authentic love for and understanding of their subject matter, and that is what makes their work so attractive and convincing. Silke, on the other hand, knew nothing of that world, and had no real interest in becoming part of it. He was totally out of his element.

"I still respect and admire the work of these artists, but I couldn't compete with them. Art has to be honest and sincere to be any good. And artists have to be honest and sincere in order to compete and keep at it year after year, and the women's magazines were just way too polite and sanitized for me."

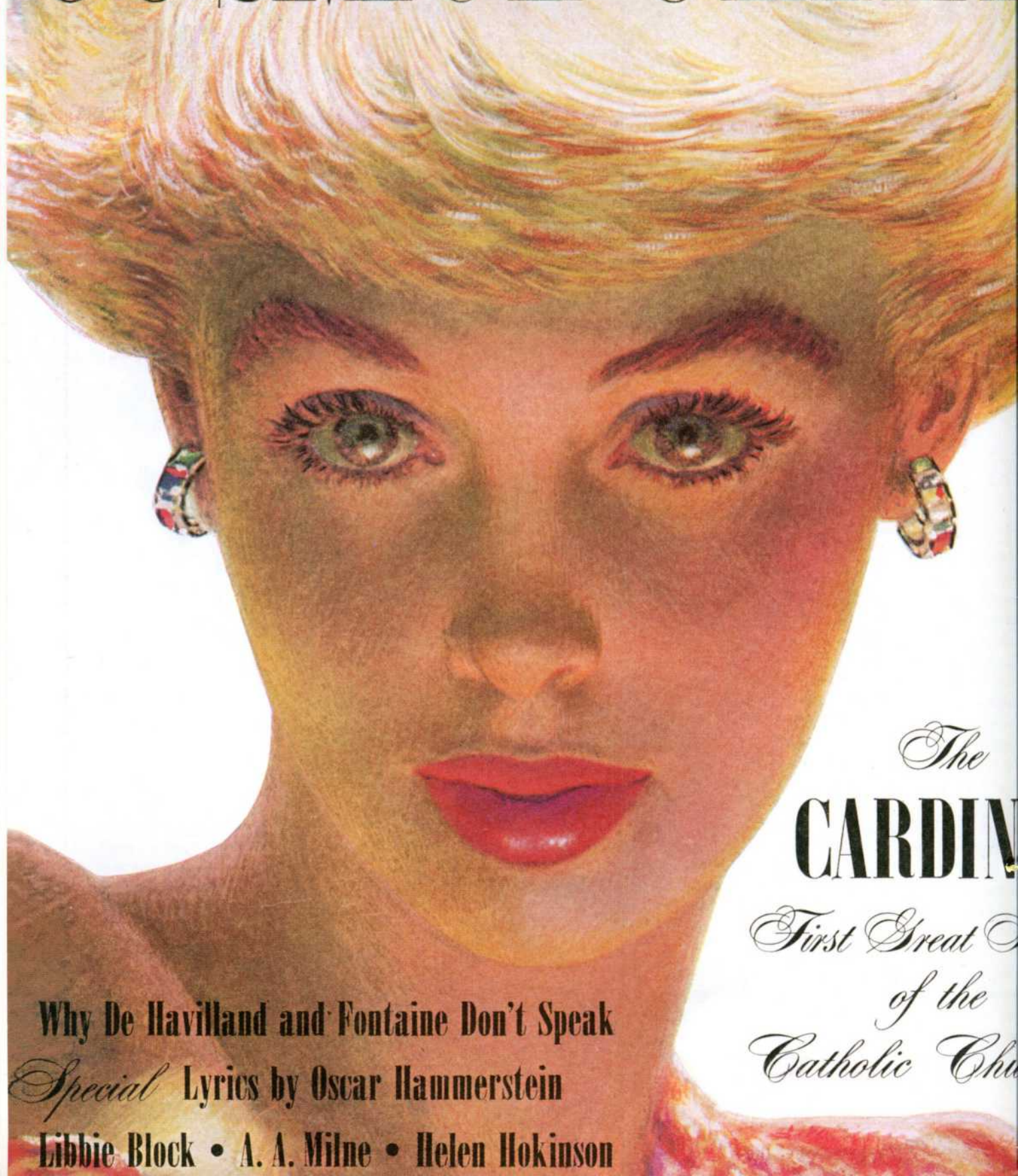
Too legitimate.

Opposite: Illustration by John LaGatta for *The Ladies Home Journal* in 1938. **Above:** Illustration by Al Parker for *Hollywood Daughter* by Barbara Dickenson, published by *Cosmopolitan* in the late 1950s.

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COSMOPOLITAN



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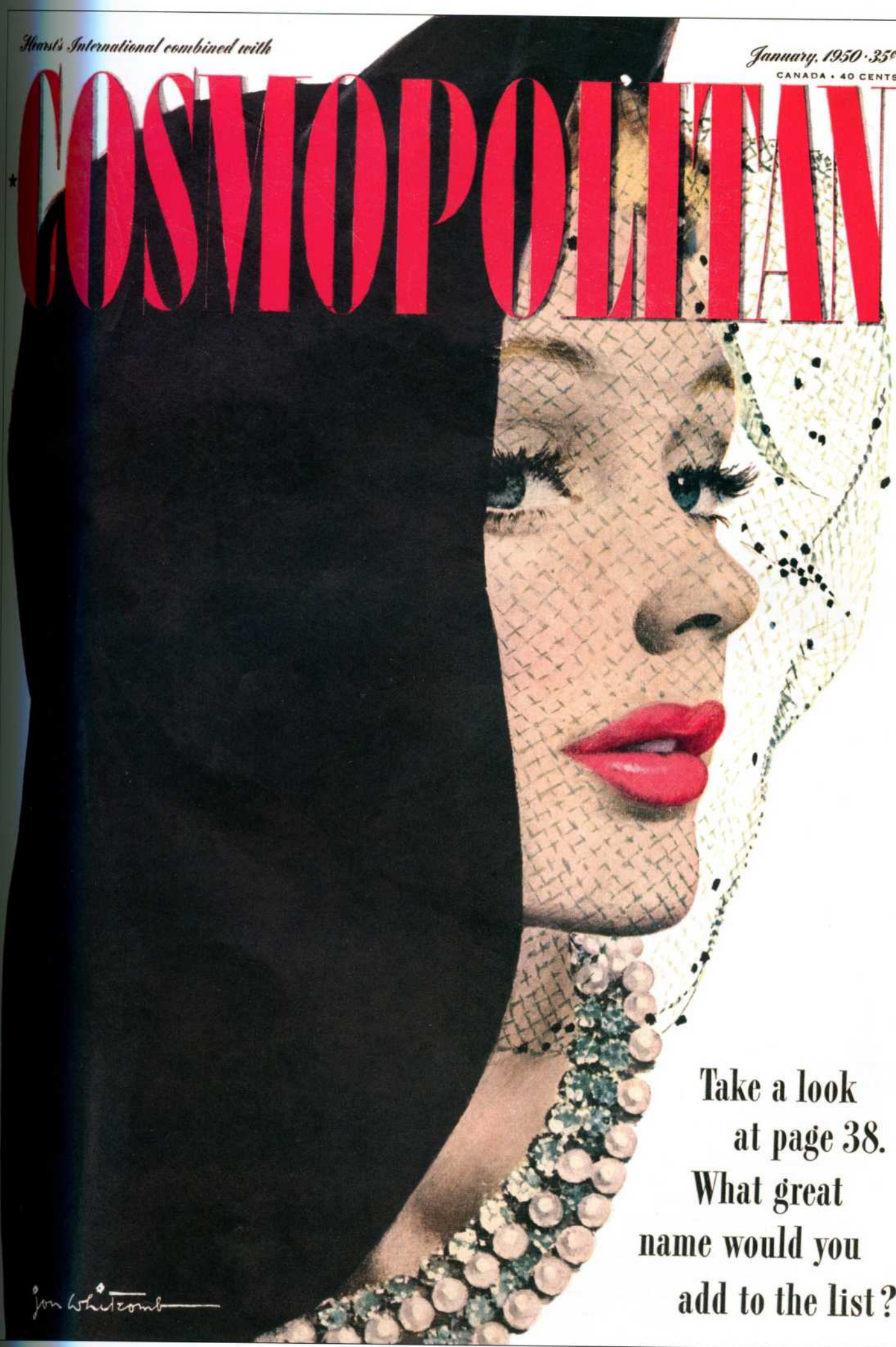
Why De Havilland and Fontaine Don't Speak
Special **Lyrics by Oscar Hammerstein**
Libbie Block • A. A. Milne • Helen Hokinson

Hearst's International combined with

January, 1950 • 35¢

CANADA • 40 CENTS

COSMOPOLITAN



Jon Whitcomb

Take a look
at page 38.
What great
name would you
add to the list?



CLARA ***
BOW

Silk
'02



GODDESSES

"You can't imagine how happy it makes a man to see a woman like you—just to look at her."
 —Cheyenne to Jill in *Once Upon A Time In the West* (1968)

All right, now we're going to jump ahead to the 1990s and explore why Silke made the decision, even though by accident, to become a girly artist. To give you a hint, he insisted on this chapter's title.

Now, if this were a play instead of a revue, the second act would start about here and our adventurous hero would have to confront his inner problem, the tension between his religious childhood and his current profession. Pin-up art is overtly sexual. That's a given. Silke is determined to do his best to create pin-up art. That's a given. But to accommodate his background, he needs to justify it, needs a reason to believe it has some value, some importance. Preferably, a religious reason. Now, as strange as it may seem, this guy thinks he has one. So, here goes.

In the beginning was desire, and it was woman.

Men have known this truth for only about ten to twelve thousand years. Women, of course, have always known it. But when the Christian Church took over the Western world about sixteen hundred years ago, it rewrote the premise: "In the beginning was desire, it was woman, and it was bad." The holy fathers, in liturgical edicts, divine inspiration, and Sunday school class, made it clear that women were not interested in sex, and if they were, they were evil. Satan's playmates.

Does that mean if you're drawing pin-ups, you're doing the devil's work? "You bet!" says Silke. "That's how a lot of folks see it."

He's right. That's because the link between women and desire is at the core of glamour art, and the message is clear. Whether the art is done beautifully by George Petty and Alberto Vargas, or badly as it was on the covers of *Titter*, *Wink*, and *Beauty Parade*, whether the girls portrayed are luminous goddesses, cute little bubbleheads, or floozies, whether they smile invitingly or pretend not to notice you are eyeballing them, whether they are hot or innocent, tramp or fashion plate, the paper pretties offer themselves directly to you, letting you know that they crave a man brave enough to take them, and that they are helpless to resist. All yours.

The centerfold, calendar, and cover girls, of course, can't help themselves. They are made of paper. That means that while their



poses and expressions make it clear they are total pushovers, they are at the same time totally unavailable. Does that mean girl art is simply a game of tease, or is there possibly something more profound and provoking at work than easy sex? Well, the way I figure it, for most of us easy sex is just fine. But not for Silke. He's gotta find something profound in it, so he dug into history until he satisfied himself that there is sufficient reason to believe that the church had blown it, and that there are primal, necessary reasons not only for living and breathing temptresses, but for bedtime babies and bare naked ladies made of paper. The following, in brief, is how he sorted this out.

Once upon a time, a long, long time ago, about 10,000 to 20,000 B.C., long before the first "Thou shall not..." was written, women ruled the Mediterranean world. Back then, men couldn't figure out why their favorite cow or girlfriend got pregnant, why it rained some days and not others, why the sun came up in the morning and the moon at night, or why fire, lightning, and the Great Cave Bear struck down one man and not another. The women, always ready to grasp an opportunity, quickly filled this void in the male intellect, claiming it was the power of the all-seeing Earth Mother, the great pooh-bah of everything, the holy of holies who decided who should live and who should die, and that the priestesses of the Goddess were the only ones who could intercede with the Great Mother on man's behalf.

This scared the bananas out of the men, even made the Larry Flynts and Ralph Laurens of that time tremble. They had no idea how

women became pregnant and bore children, and therefore considered them magic. Consequently, for the next twenty thousand years or so men bowed down in abject obedience to the female deity.

To make it easy on the men, the lady priests divided the Great Goddess into three parts, Virgin, Nymph, and Mother. The men, of course, couldn't figure out why there should be any virgins, and they were naturally afraid of their mothers. But the Nymph part they caught onto real quick.

The Nymph was the provocateur of life, the instigator, the sacred fire that created life and made their livers quiver, and they were more than eager to worship at her gate of life. But there was a problem. If you fooled around with a Nymph, there was a damn good chance you'd end up with a Mother. But if you denied yourself the Nymphs, then they suddenly became even more desirable. And if you still kept your distance, their magic became irresistible, and you went to them blabbering mindless sentiments and promises in the hope of worshiping between their sacred thighs. So, that totally available and totally unavailable thing that you find in pin-up art has been at work a long, long time.

When the men took over Western civilization, and imposed their own ideas of how things should work, they still retained the Nymph, corraling all the attributes of the Earth Mother in one deity, and calling her Asherat, Ishtar, Aphrodite, Venus, and a smorgasbord of other titles so that she is often referred to as The Goddess of a Thousand Names. Then, as I pointed out earlier, when the Christians

took over, they took the Virgin and Mother into their theology, cramming the pair into one deity called the Virgin Mary, the Mother of God, and tried to throw the Nymph out. But the little vixen wasn't about to be so easily dismissed.

Looking around at the cultures of the Dark and Middle Ages, the Nymph quickly found out that she was more than welcome on the wicked, wicked stage. First she traveled with the wayfaring entertainers, the jugglers, buffoons, dancers, and fools who traveled from castle to castle singing for their supper. Then, while the Church was busy developing a theater from which women were excluded, and the aristocrats of the High Renaissance still clung to recreating classic Greek and Roman plays in which the female roles were played by young men, the Nymph moved through the streets and market places to become an integral part of the first organized troupe of traveling players, the *commedia dell'arte*.

The Church was quick to denounce them. "The low women who ordinarily act," declared a Jesuit priest in 1589, "are beautiful, lewd, and have bartered their virtue, and with gestures and movements of the whole body, and with voices bland and suave, with beautiful costumes, like sirens they charm and transform men into beasts and lure them the more easily to destruction as they themselves are the more wicked and lost to every sense of virtue."

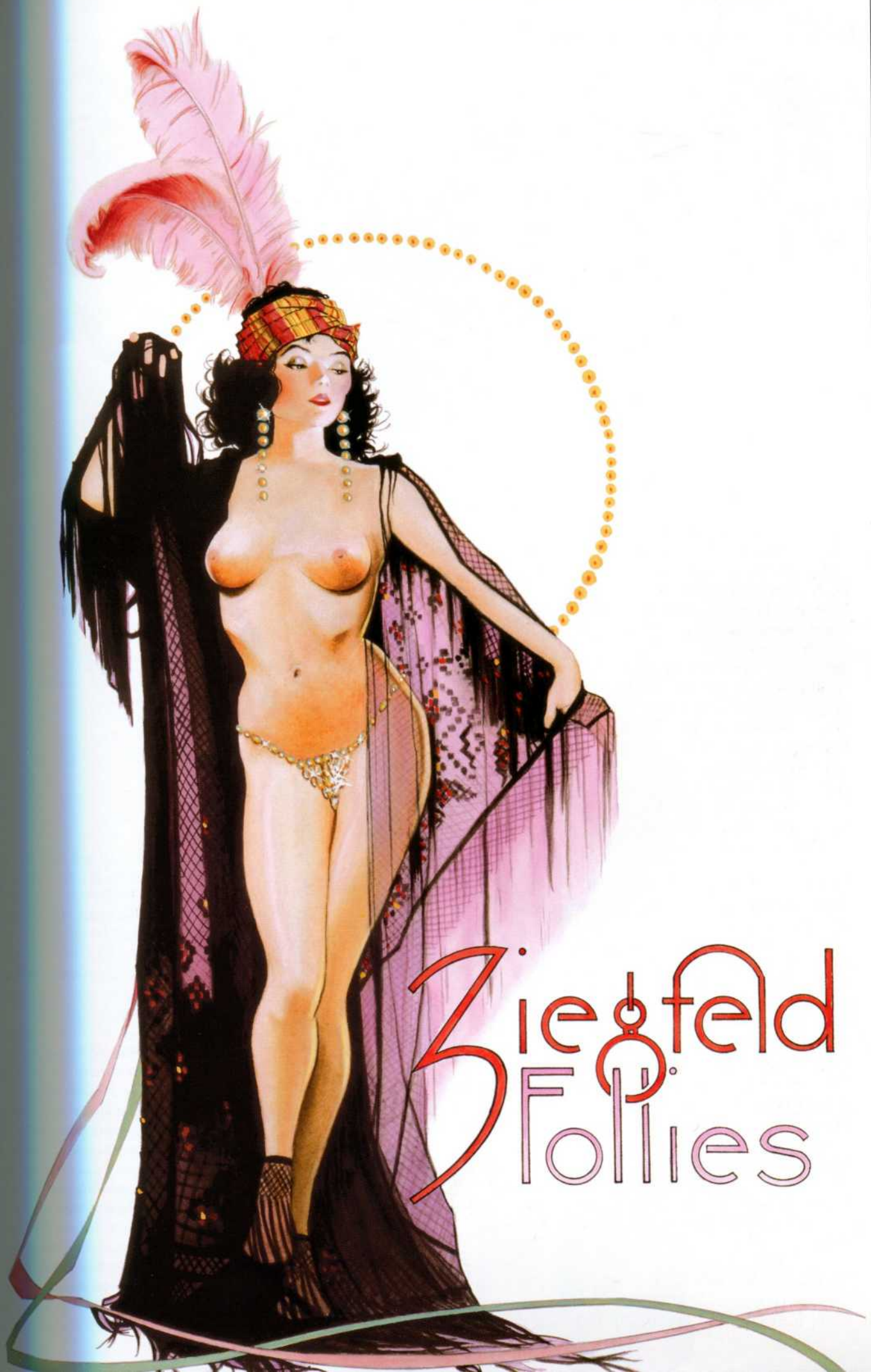
Above: Earl Carroll Vanities, figure based on Yvonne Menard and face based on Maureen O'Sullivan. Ink, watercolor, and gouache on paper. Private Collection. **Opposite:** Ziegfeld Folies, ink, watercolor, and gouache on paper. Private Collection.

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Ziegfeld Follies



As late as 1862, critics were still at it. Robert Baldrick, in *The Concourt Journal*, declared that the theater "...is a center of debauchery...like a stock exchange dealing in women's nights."

But despite the clergy's protests, the Nymph had finally found her place in male society, and she was not about to give it up.

On stage, the Eternal Nymph took many parts, her favorite being the clown Columbine, a lovely, light-minded, or strong-minded, sex object possessing an incarnate sensuality, a destructive or creative life force that is beyond moral or rational control. In play after play, she would seduce the clown Pierot, a naïve and moonstruck victim of the world, a world that remorselessly frustrates all his desires. Then, in the following scene, she would add to his frustrations by cheating on him with the clown Harlequin, a brutal, cynical trickster with acrobatic skills whose behavior bordered on the criminal, and who was definitely and persistently obscene.

In another play, she would charm the clown playing the Doctor or Professor, both pretentious pedagogues, then knock him off his pompous pedestal by marrying the clown Pantaloon, a miserly, foolish, credulous old man who would inevitably become the perfect cuckold of a husband.

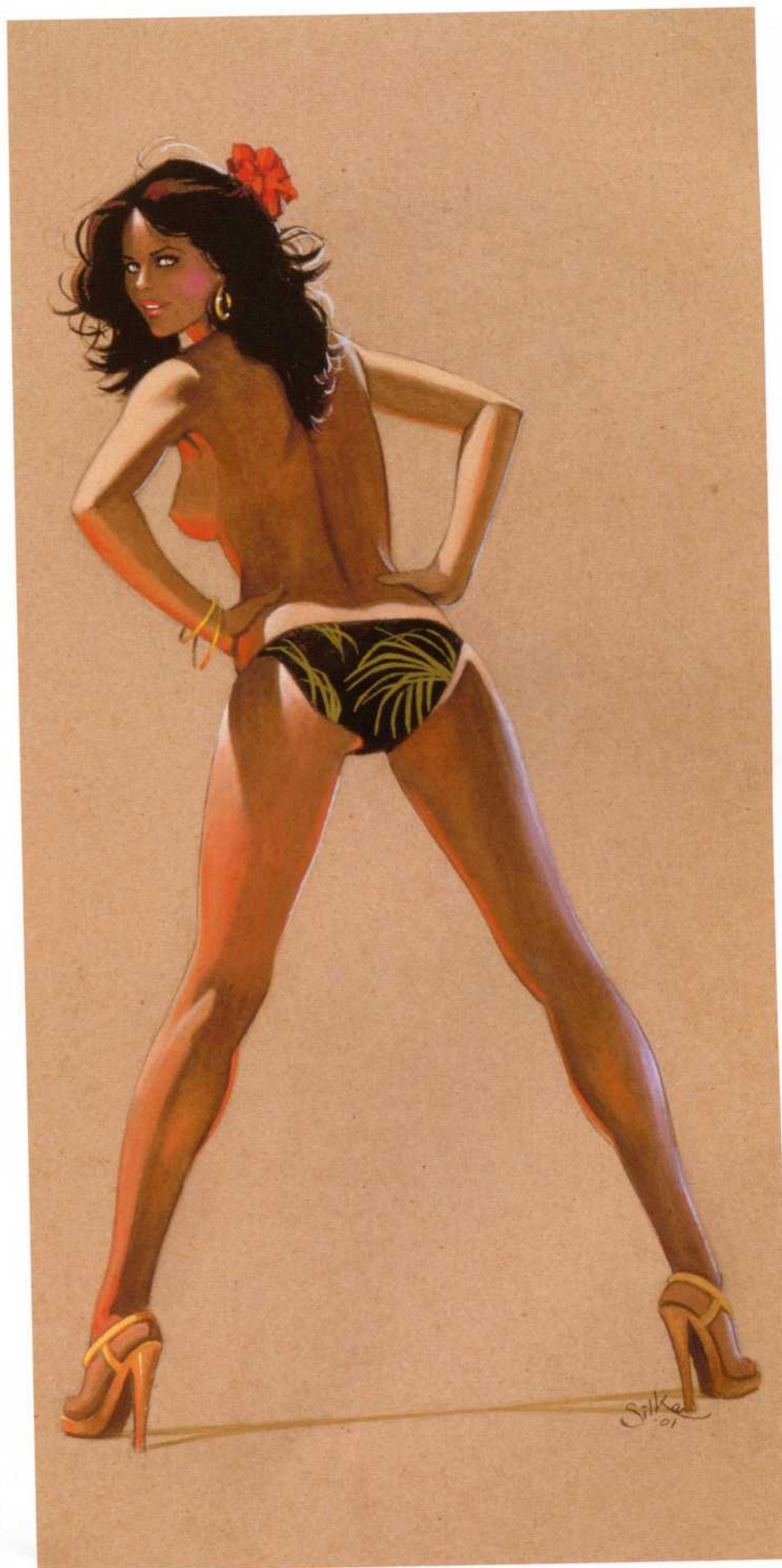
The plots of the plays performed by the commedia dell'arte were all put in motion by love, by the romantic difficulties of a pair of lovers, a lovely, sweet, young beauty and a handsome young hero. The lovers, known as the *Graciosi*, were straight characters that followed the script and carried the plot forward. But the plot was secondary to the antics of the other characters, the clowns whose performances were improvised, often mimicking and satirizing the local magistrates of the town where they were performing.

As the plays got better and the role of the young heroine became stronger, the Nymph also took her part. All of the clowns, of course, are stylized versions of characters you could find in every village and town in the world, from the time of the Greeks down to today.

The enormous success of the commedia dell'arte eventually led to the construction of their own theaters in Rome, Paris, London, Berlin, and elsewhere, where they competed with the legitimate theater. In time, the clowns eventually transformed themselves and carried their madcap spirit and theatrical style into the traveling circuses, vaudeville troupes, and burlesque shows, then they merged with the players performing in musical comedies, and finally became the featured stars of the great Broadway girl revues, *The Ziegfeld Follies*, *The George White Scandals*, and *The Earl Carroll Vanities*. Their greatest opportunity, of course, came with the advent of motion pictures where they are still at play.

If you find it difficult to identify these characters or their spirit today, let me point out that two of the most famous films of the last century were made in the commedia dell'arte style. Both left out the *Graciosi* characters and gave the job of carrying the plot to the principal characters, Harlequin, Pierot, and Columbine.

One is the classic French film, *Children of Paradise*, written by Jacques Prévert and directed by Marcel Carné in 1945. It tells the story of a mime (Pierot) who loves a beautiful, beguiling, enigmatic entertainer (Columbine). She, in turn, loves him, another actor, a snobbish aristocrat, and a criminal (Harlequin).



Opposite: Michelle Bauer, posed in 1984 for an early version of *Rascals In Paradise* titled "Spicy and the Starbandits," and painted in 2003. Ink, watercolor and gouache on paper. Above: *Tropic Beauty*, gouache on cardboard. Private Collection.





The other is *Some Like It Hot* written by IAL. Diamond and Billy Wilder, and directed by Wilder in 1959. It tells the story of two musicians who dress up like women and join a girl band in order to hide from a bunch of bootlegging gangsters chasing them. The band includes a singer, Sugar Kowalczyk, played by Marilyn Monroe in the Columbine role. Tony Curtis plays Joe/Josephine in the seducer/trickster Harlequin role, and Jack Lemmon plays Jerry/Daphne in the Pierot role, a victim of life put upon by the gangsters, his best friend, and by his own naïveté about his bisexual nature.

For better or worse, all of the searching and reasoning convinced Silke that pin-up art is simply a way of providing another stage for the Eternal Nymph, and that the way to present her is in the trashy, ribald, colorful, illegitimate style of the commedia dell'arte.

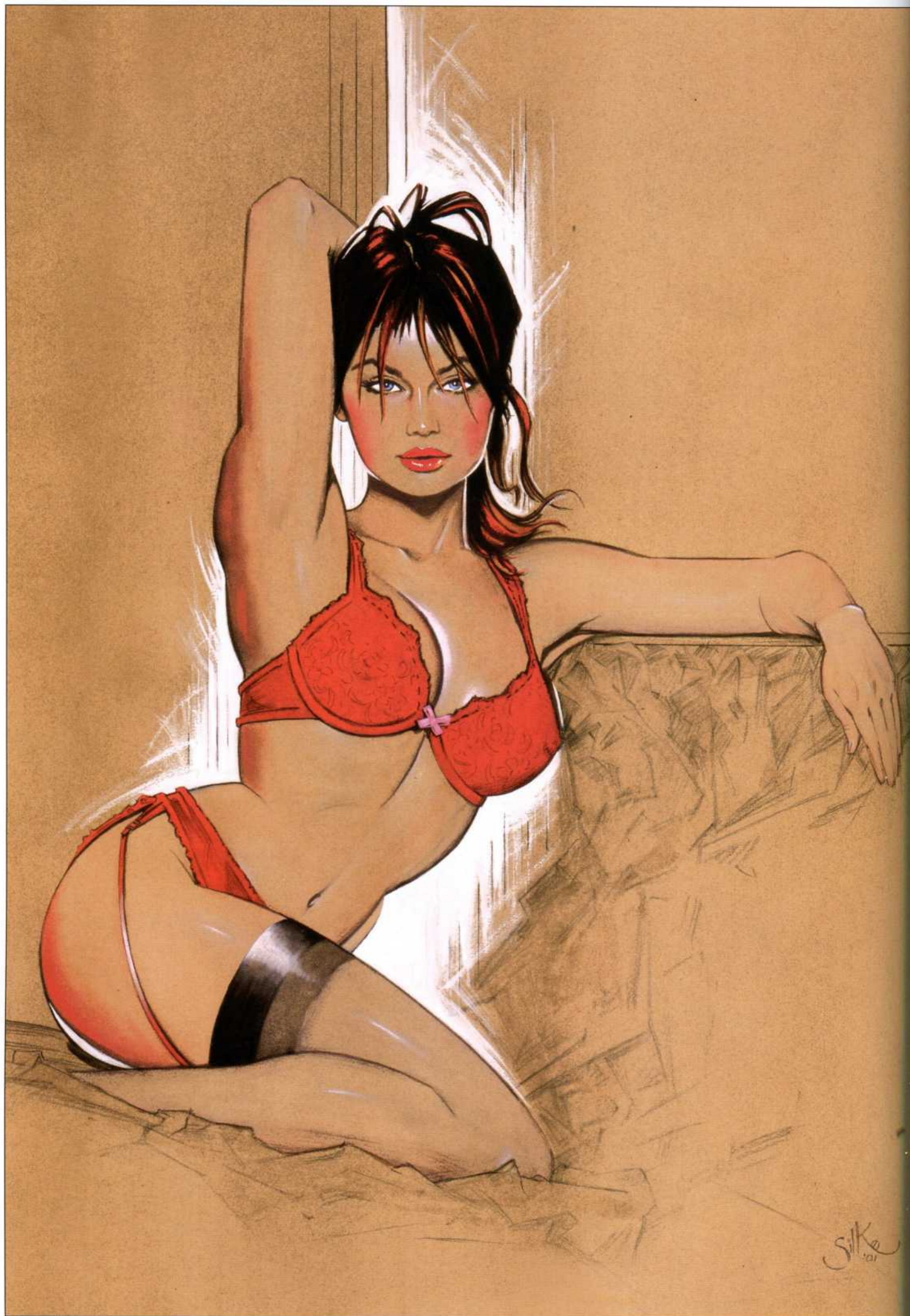
In short, Silke found in this ancient, undocumented, pagan, female religion a possible justification for what he does. But I don't buy it, not yet. Justification, redemption, and profound are still words that do not, no matter how good Silke is at his historical hocus-pocus, mix well with bimbo, sugar baby, and ding-dong girl.

But his claim that pin-up art is best served by the style of the commedia dell'arte makes a whole lot of sense, as you'll see in the next chapter.

Opposite: *Betty Boop*, ink, watercolor, and gouache on paper. *Private Collection.* **Above:** *About Last Night*, ink, watercolor, and gouache on paper. *Private Collection.*







Above: Laetitia Casta, pencil and gouache on colored paper, *Private Collection*. **Opposite:** Lisa Marie Scott, gouache on colored paper, *Private Collection*.







Opposite: Lisa Marie Scott, gouache on colored paper. Above: Gene Tierney
in *Shanghai Gesture* (1941), ink, watercolor, and gouache on paper.

FILM FUN

JUNE 20¢



TIME
TO START
GAZING



BEDTIME BABIES

*But each for the joy of the working, and each, in his separate star,
Shall draw the Thing as he sees It for the God of Things as They are!*

—Rudyard Kipling / “When Earth’s Last Picture Is Painted” (1892)

When Silke conceived *Rascals In Paradise*, he envisioned himself drawing Claudia Cardinale’s laughter and Brigitte Bardot’s smile over and over again. But it didn’t happen. “When I actually did the work, Claudia ended up an angry savage and I don’t think I got more than two smiles out of Bardot.”

Looking at his ladies in this book, you’ll also see that there are very few smiles and only one or two laughs. It’s not that Silke can’t draw a laughing face: it’s something else.

“There are hundreds, thousands of smiling, laughing beauties in my photo file, but when I go through them to find someone to draw I end up picking a very serious, even sullen face with a lot of attitude. The same happens when a model poses for me;

she’ll laugh and smile most of the time she’s here, but what ends up on film is a long ways from comedy.”

This is why Silke envies the artists represented on these pages, Enoch Bolles, George Petty, and Rolf Armstrong.

“The spirit that these three artists put on paper is the same spirit the clowns of the commedia dell’arte put on stage. The spirit of the illegitimate theater that recognizes that life is fundamentally chaotic; a zany, ribald, beautiful dream that will somehow turn out well. That’s the spirit I would most like to evoke, and the one that eludes me.”

The pictures these three men created, from around 1915 to 1950, evoke a bold, energetic joy. Their women are strong, vivid,

full of life, and openly embrace the commonplace, popular, and commercial. The trashy and profane. They have absolutely no pretensions, except for a healthy confidence in their own beauty, and they and the world they inhabit seem absolutely genuine.

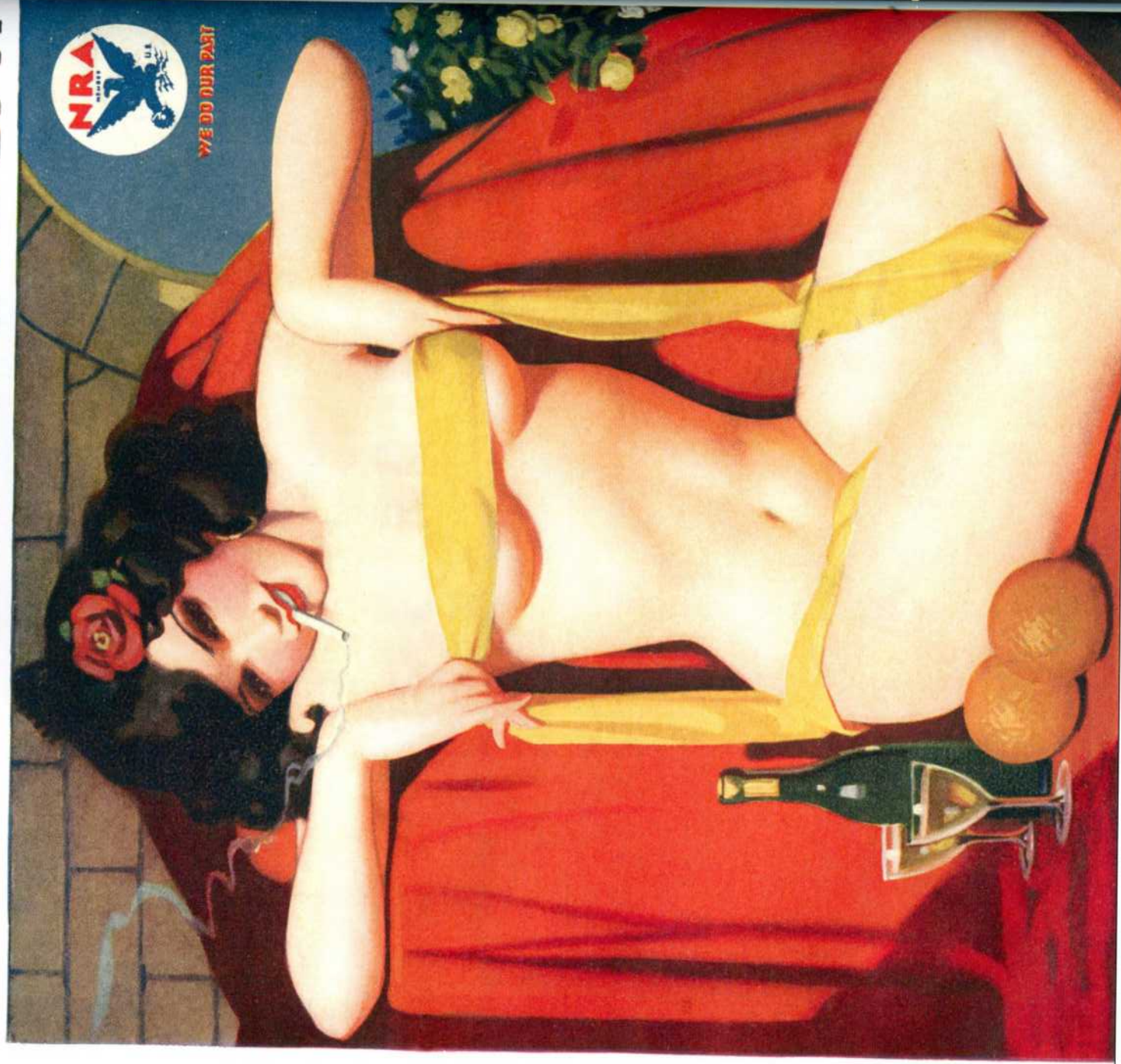
“I love them because they bring fun into my life, and fulfill a personal criteria for art. Their pictures have a quality of redemption that I crave: the girls they paint have a joyous spirit that compels imitation.”

Silke knows that they’re dream girls with impossibly perfect bodies and faces, and that the pictures celebrate their surface beauty, celebrate all that is superficial: flesh, color, action, hair styles, slinky clothes, rhinestones, bubble beads, costumes, and cosmetics. But from Silke’s point of view,

BEDTIME

Stories

A HUNDRED
LOVES BY EVA TANGUAY



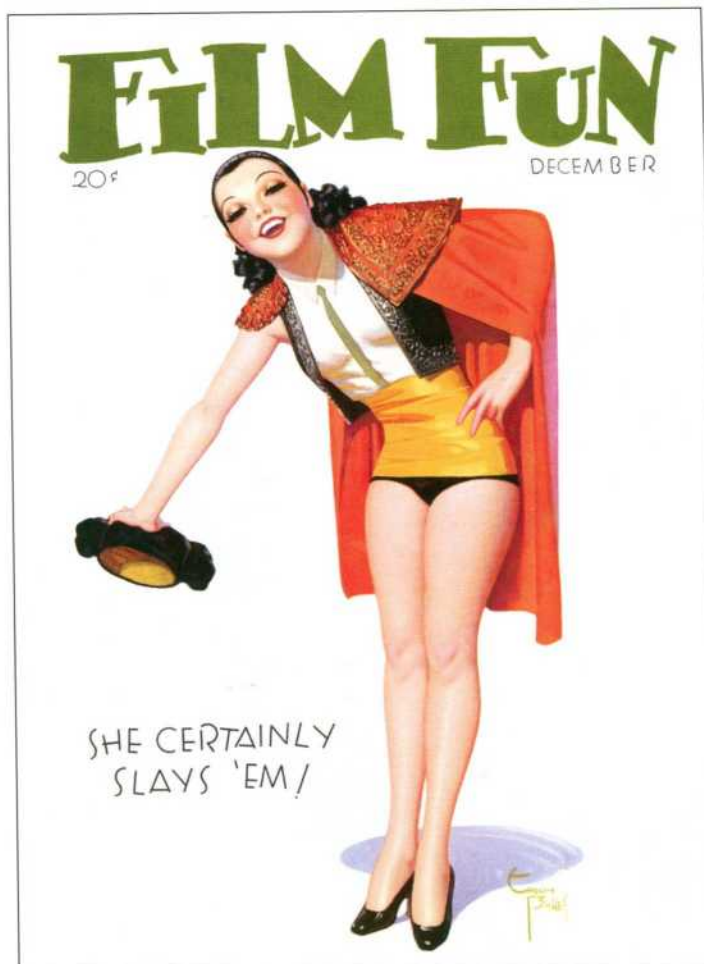
they do it in order to contend with all that's real, and that's his point.

These artists are burlesquing life, and having one great time doing it.

Silke has no idea whether or not Bolles, Armstrong, and Petty gave any thought to this spirit, but they are all masters of exaggeration, innuendo, color, and humor, and there is an overall light-hearted ambience to their pictures which radiates a carefree excitement, a feeling of good times being had by all. Each is an excellent draftsman, but each subordinates that quality to design and color, imposing their personal style on it. All artists do this, but not to the degree that these men do. That's because it's a tricky process: style can become the main attraction, can very easily dominate the subject, and does so in the work of many artists. In the case of Bolles, Armstrong, and Petty, their styles not only capture the model and her beauty, but also reveal and enhance it, as if the styles were born of that beauty.

"It's really easy to foul up pin-up art, and lose that joyous, unselfconscious, guiltless, sexual titillation. If just one overly ambitious hormone runs wild, all the beauty, desire, and effervescence you envisioned turns into cheap sex."

Bolles' style borders on being a cartoon. On the covers of *Film Fun*, *Gay Book*, *Judge*, and *Spicy Stories* his artwork often even has a gag line accompanying it. His cutie-pies sometimes seem to be made of rubber, and twist and bend about with impossible elasticity to fit into his whimsical Deco designs. His work appeared primarily on the covers of "pulp," magazines printed on rough, cheap paper that catered to genre markets: romance, western, crime, sex, and humor. Some of the pulp titles he did covers for, such as *Tattle Tales*, *Bedtime Stories*, and *Hollywood Nights*, had to be sold under the counter, and *Film Fun* had its second class mailing permit revoked by the U.S. postmaster General in the early forties due to the publication of "salacious material." Bolles worked the bottom end of the commercial art world, earning about \$60 to \$150 a cover (when he could collect), while slick magazine artists were being paid from \$375 to \$600 for a small, black and white interior drawing. "I suspect," says Silke, "that, like the wayfaring minstrels, Bolles sang for his supper not only because he had to eat, but because he had to sing."



Opposite: Cover illustration by Enoch Bolles for the October 1933 issue of *Bedtime Stories*, published by Nuregal Publishing Corporation. Right: Cover illustrations by Enoch Bolles for *Film Fun*, done in the 1930s. Published by Dell Publishing Co., Inc.

George Petty's first pin-up girl appeared in 1931 in the first issue of *Esquire* magazine. Over the years, his beauties slowly changed from cartoons to glamour paintings, and in the December 1939 issue his beauty became the magazine's first gatefold. His price jumped with it, from \$100 a cartoon to \$1000 a painting. Petty cobbled his beauties together, taking a face from one model, the legs from another, and so on. For Silke, the simplicity of his pictures has always been his most startling achievement. "Each image features a single figure against an empty white background with only a costume and one or two props to carry the story, atmosphere, and spirit."

Petty's skills as a designer and draftsman allow him to simplify the figure's anatomy while at the same time exaggerating it. The girls in the two Old Gold cigarette advertisements shown here are each over nine heads tall, with their legs accounting for six heads or two-thirds of their bodies. Nevertheless, their figures still look right, while an average girl is five-and-a-half to six heads tall, with the division of legs and torso being about equal. His coloring is also an exaggeration, or glorification, with dark warm sienna shadows fading perfectly (using an airbrush) to a pale flesh tone, the whole figure then being finished off with his signature vermilion outline.

Armstrong's best work was done for the covers of *College Humor* magazine whose editors allowed him to pick his own models



and paint them the way he wished without editorial comment. His style, like his life, is dashing and lavish. He worked in pastels directly from the model, sometimes doing six or seven roughs ranging in size from three by five inches to four by seven feet. Easily one of the most successful commercial artists of his time, he had long-term contracts with *College Humor* and the movie magazines *Photoplay* and *Screenland*. In the thirties, when the movie magazines began using photographs on their covers instead of artwork, he went to work for the Brown & Bigelow calendar company and became their best selling artist.

The arbiters of *high art*, of course, do not consider Bolles, Petty, or Armstrong to be artists, and even the commercial art world ignored them until very recently. Their work now sells for anywhere from five to thirty thousand dollars a painting. Silke, of course, has been collecting the work of these three men since he first became aware of their talent, and over the years, he's diligently tried to capture the same elusive spirit they have in his own work, and he still tries right down to imitating Petty's vermillion outline. But, as far as he's concerned, to no avail.

"I simply don't have the design skills of these artists, and it isn't easy for me to summon up that natural sense of humor and joy required by the spirit I so admire. Then again, maybe it's just that, the way I work, the models won't let me."

They have another story for him to tell.



Opposite: Illustration by George Petty for the February 1940 issue of *Esquire*, copyright Hearst Communications, Inc. **Above:** Illustration by George Petty for a 1946 issue of *True*, copyright 1946 by Fawcett Publications, Inc.



Copied, 1939, by P. Lorillard Co.

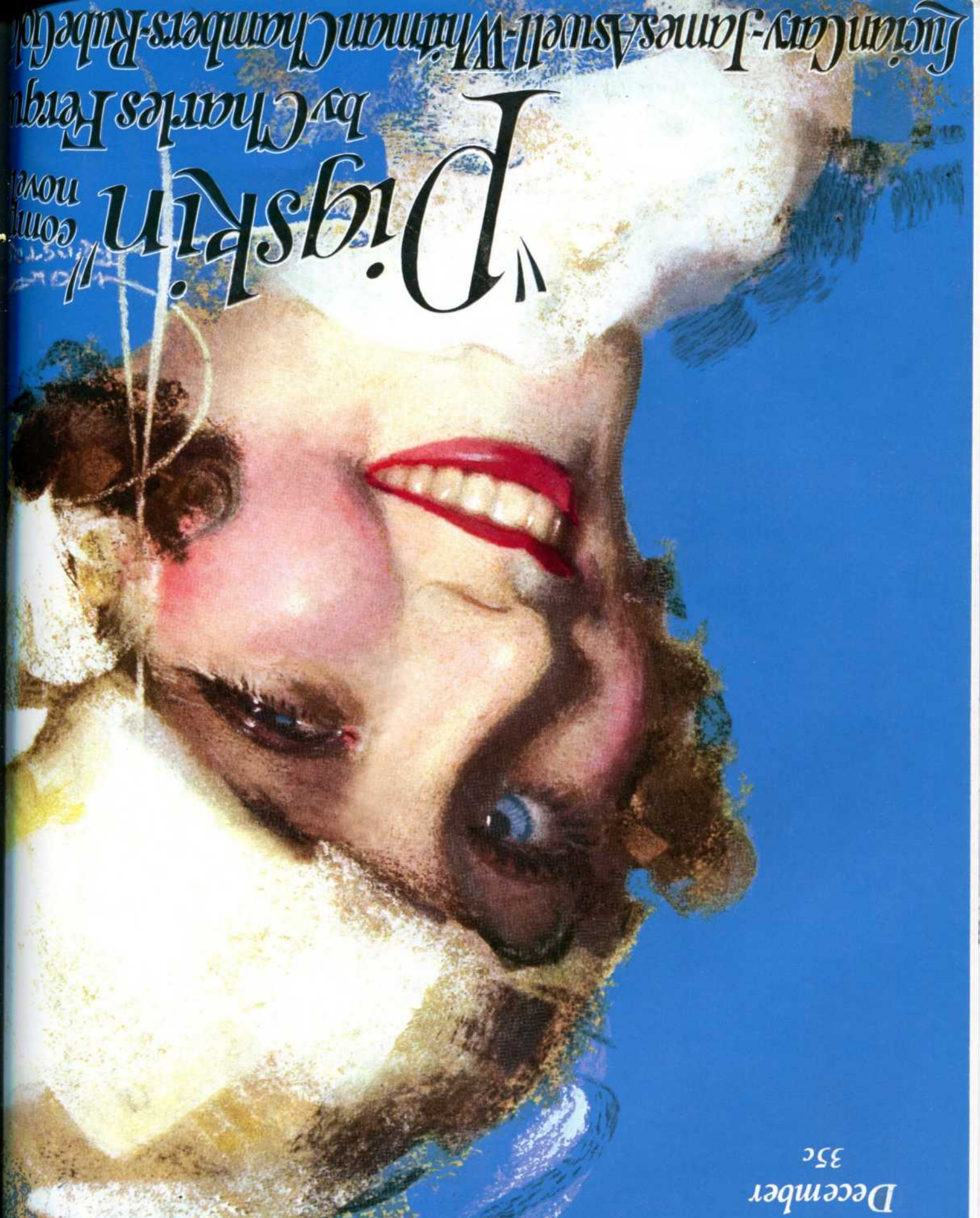


Copr., 1939, by P. Lorillard Co.

Above and opposite: Illustrations by George Petty for Old Gold Cigarettes, copyright 1938 and 1939 by Lorillard Co., Inc.

College Humo

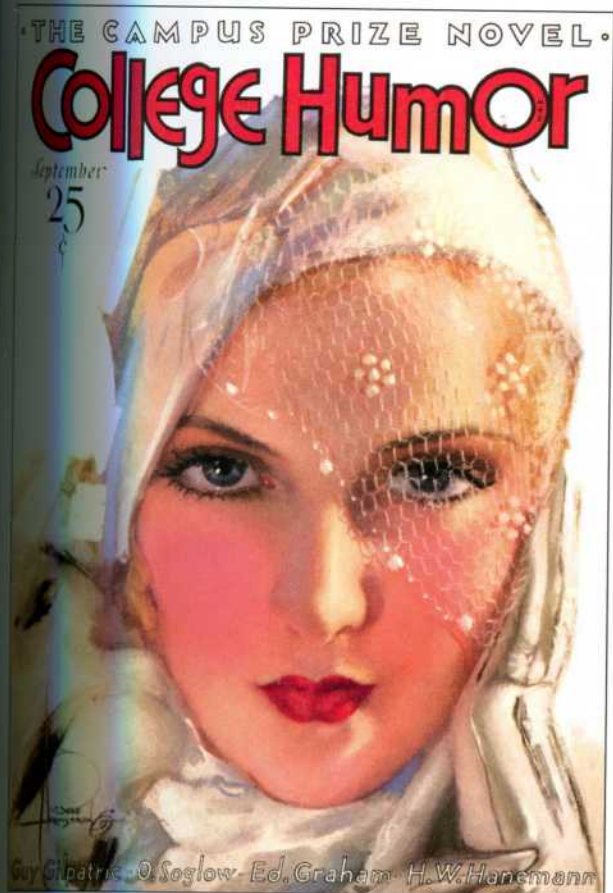
December
35c



"Digskin"

by Charles Fergu

Lucian Cary-James Aswell-Whitman Chambers-Rube G



Reprints: Cover illustration by Rolf Armstrong for the December 1929 issue of *College Humor*, published by Collegiate World Publishing Company. Above: Rolf Armstrong covers for the September 1932 and February 1928 issues of *College Humor*. Below: Rolf Armstrong covers for the June 1928 and May 1929 issues of *College Humor*, published by Collegiate World Publishing Company.

College Humor

THE BEST COMEDY IN AMERICA



GEO. JEAN NA

KATHARINE B

MAY EDGIN

O. O. McIN

ABE MA

COREY

CYRIL

April
35c

The Best Comedy in America

College Humor

March

A PROM-MISS TO BE REMEMBERED

35 Cents

ROLF ARMSTRONG





BARE NAKED LADIES

"BB does not cast spells...when she strips, she is not unveiling a mystery. She is showing her body, neither more nor less."

—Simone de Beauvoir/Brigitte Bardot (1959)

Simone de Beauvoir claims Brigitte Bardot simply displayed her flesh and bones in her films, that neither she nor her directors had any intention other than to show you a lovely young woman who is completely blasé about her nudity, even unconscious of it. There was no motive, no agenda or subtle aesthetic purpose in her nudity.

Nevertheless, back in the early fifties, when Silke first saw Bardot up there on the silver screen, he lost it. Totally. You can't really blame him, after all he was an insatiably curious forties boy with a frustrated libido. Seeing a beautiful naked woman was one of the impossible dreams of his childhood, and the sight of one bare shoulder could make his imagination conjure up harems, orgies, and assorted acts of female kindness all being directed toward him. And when Bardot

dropped her towel in *Love Is My Profession* and displayed the most beautiful naked body in Western civilization, not just a shoulder but the whole damn thing, she definitely, despite de Beauvoir's claims, cast her spell on Silke.

"BB was the first truly beautiful real woman I tried to possess with my pencil, and I can tell you that a pencil is a damn poor tool to romance someone with, particularly when you're a bumbling, inept, fool of a boy. The best I could do was scratch at her surface getting nowhere, and the frustration was enormous.

"I decided that there must be some reason why Brigitte Bardot was so much more beautiful naked than clothed. I figured that the Earth Mother, God, Nicholas Devil, or

whoever designed the world had to have had something in mind."

Years passed without any answers, but then in 1971, Silke discussed nudity in films with Alfred Hitchcock and Hitchcock told him, "You can't show a naked woman on the screen, or any part of her suggesting she is nude, a thigh or breast, without causing an erotic response in the audience." That suggested to Silke that Bardot and her coworkers were perhaps displaying her nudity in as natural a way as possible to get rid of the mysteries about her, thus making her even more available and more erotic. In other words, they were simply employing their theatrical craft, manipulating that magic distance between the performer and spectator in a manner that he was not used to, but one that he definitely reacted to.





That struck a cord with Silke. In reading about the great girl revues staged on Broadway in the 1910s and 1920s, he had learned that Florenz Ziegfeld in his *Ziegfeld Follies* had shown a unique ability at combining the exotic and glamorous with the familiar. Ziegfeld dressed his girls as turkeys, foxes, and baby chicks. He decorated them as playing cards, had them riding elephants, horses, and peacocks, sprayed them with silver and gold, and draped them in laces from around the world. Ziegfeld mixed high culture aesthetics with low culture entertainment. A fandango would be followed by a ballet, the sentiment of *A Pretty Girl is Like a Melody* by the vulgarity of *Ten Cents a Dance*. A few of Ziegfeld's beauties did perform partially nude, but by law they had to stand still and could only be seen by the audience from a great distance. That lack of motion along with the physical distance provided the magic distance necessary to glamour and eroticism.

Silke figured that Bardot produced her magic in the opposite way. On the screen, her body is twenty feet tall and she moves about seemingly unconscious of the fact she is totally unadorned. The high culture beauty of her body is combined with the commonplace familiarity of the set, a business office or bedroom, with a commonplace wardrobe, a simple white T-shirt or sheet, and with what was then considered a low class indifference to her nudity. These thoughts went together with another bit of magic Silke had observed.

Around the same time, the designer of the Tiffany's windows in New York was displaying the incredibly articulated beauty of the store's jewels in settings that were totally natural and commonplace, such as displaying diamonds and rubies in actual birds' nests.

Since Silke couldn't capture the necessary magic in the manner that Bolles, Armstrong, and Petty did, he wondered if he could produce his nude beauties in the manner the Tiffany designer did, by staging the incredible beauty of his models in natural poses in which they are unaware they are being observed, or are indifferent to it, and then painting them on commonplace cardboard, such as the pictures of model Lisa Marie Scott you see on these pages.

But I'm getting ahead of myself.

Further searching eventually led Silke to discover that much of ancient Greek art and sculpture venerated the female, particularly the naked female. "In their nudes, the aesthetic was beauty, but the essential ingredient was a profound eroticism. The artists' job was

to stimulate creation in the male, as the academics so politely put it, to stimulate those generative forces in nature."

If this were true, then whoever created the world had a theological reason for making the nude Brigitte Bardot, as well as a whole lot of other women, so physically beautiful.

Certain he was on his way to an epiphany, Silke had another idea; perhaps the spirit he desired to evoke could not only be joyous, but serious. Maybe even profound. Being profound, of course, is damn close to being important, and as you know by now our boy is easily afflicted with the compulsion to be just that. So, following that line of thought, his search led him to the writings of Norman Lindsay, an obscure Australian artist who worked in the early part of the twentieth century, and whose work has had a revival in the last ten or so years.

Lindsay wrote, "The feminine image was the central motif of my work... a prime essential to a concept of life which accepts sex as its principle of continuity in space and time, which has neither beginning nor ending, but which is eternal."

That was Lindsay's aesthetic philosophy prior to World War I, and after witnessing the horrors of that war, Lindsay's passion for drawing "...the naked, eloquent, desirable female body" became even more intense. "In this concept the one assurance of continuity was the re-creation of life which drives it on into the future, over all obstacles and through all infernos."

Silke eventually realized that this was a very esoteric position to take in our modern world. "We live in a society with more money and leisure time than any in the history of the world. Unless



we or our own are personally brutalized by war, poverty, bad health, or a natural disaster, it seems that we have very little awareness that life is a struggle simply to survive, that life is essentially chaotic and dangerous, and that fate can strike us down at random. This consciousness has all but vanished from the American Good Life."

Obviously, Lindsay's philosophy caused a turning point in Silke's thinking, because there is a moral imperative in it as well as an aesthetic.

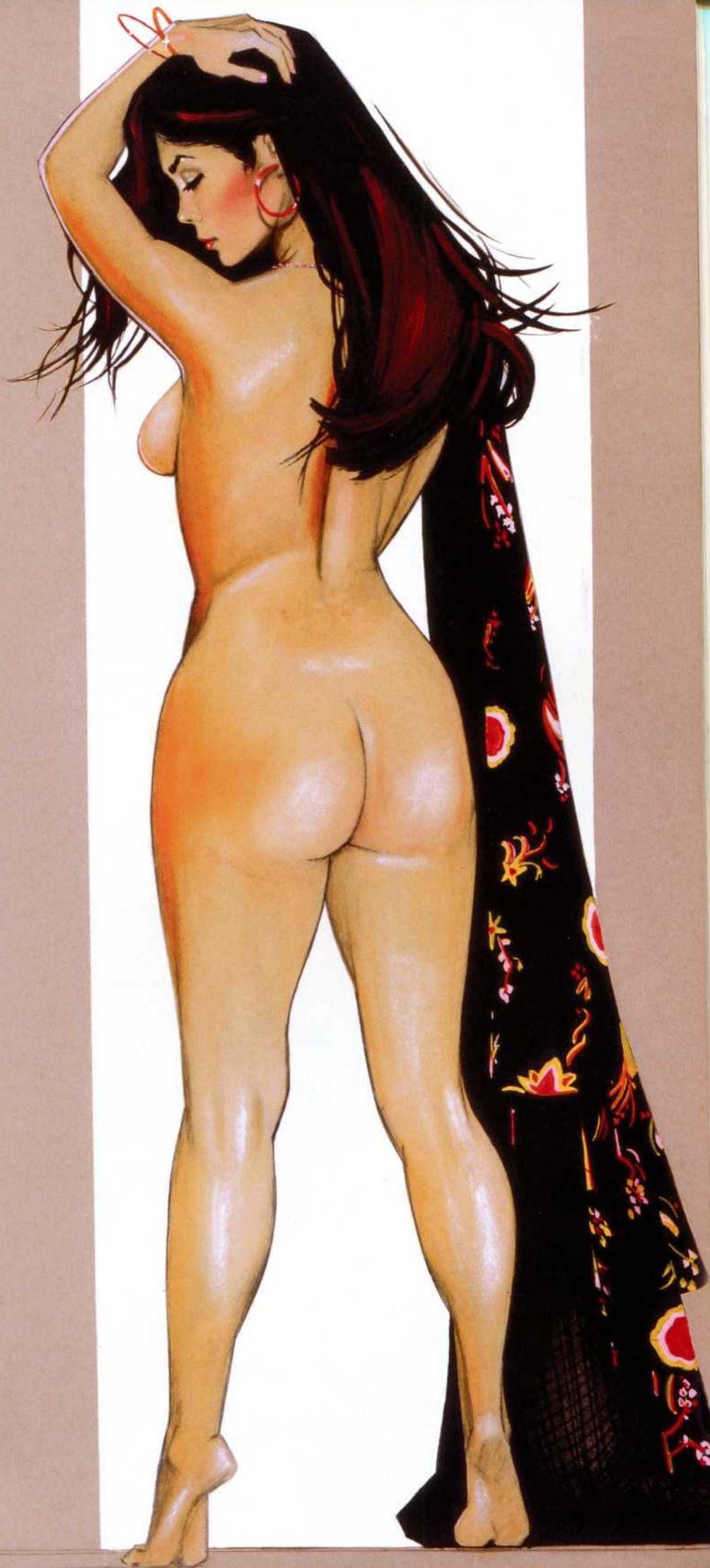
As I have pointed out, there has always been a tension between Silke's religious upbringing and his work, a tension that persists because of his respect for his father's beliefs and achievements as well as for his own desire to draw beautiful, provocative, nude women. Lindsay's philosophy allowed Silke to become brazen enough to see a possible parallel in what he does and what his father did.

"Foolishly wanted to believe that, if I was good enough, my pictures just might help someone get through the day, or at least help someone enjoy getting through the day."

As Silke grew older, he eventually had to admit to himself that his habit of drawing naked women had no moral imperative. It is simply a pleasurable, personal compulsion that he can not resist as he is continually charmed and beguiled by the wondrous, infinite variety of female bodies so generously provided by nature for those with eyes to see. It is difficult for him to discuss this compulsion without sounding like a dirty old man, so I'll spare him and quote from Sir William Russell Flint's book *Models of Propriety*, just to give you an example of how an artist can totally lose control and start chapsodizing on something as common as a naked female back.

"Creamy backs and pink backs, ivory backs and brown backs, thin backs and plump backs, backs with lovely deep central furrows and backs with bony hollows, seducing backs and modest backs; insolent backs and refined backs, classical backs and homely backs; backs of nymphs and backs of amazons; backs ideal and backs mundane; chaste backs and wicked backs and one adorable straight white back, slim, pure, and palely freckled—a back no poem could adequately praise..."

Silke's wife would say, "He's trippin'!" And Flint is! Big time. Because for glamour artists the back is only the beginning. There are knees, calves, thighs, and tummies of even more wondrous variety, to say nothing of breasts, hands, necks, forearms, and



shoulders. Then there are the lips, noses, cheeks, chins, foreheads and the soul of the girl hiding within and the style, color, and texture of the proper hair, hair in feverish disarray, hair, tumbling hair, short hair, curly, straight hair, hair as fine as spun gold, hair as black as midnight.

You get the idea. Girl artists have visions they want to put on paper, and is no different. But despite all his research and reasoning, as well as all his efforts to create them, his visions of beautiful women don't end up on paper.

Take the drawings of Lisa Marie Scott, these pages. Lisa is, of course, the *Playboy* centerfold of 1996, a short, gorgeous, young woman and "a superb model." Silke invited her to his studio to pose specifically for the illustrations in this chapter. With his vision in mind, he asked her to pose in the manner discussed above, without looking at the camera as if she were unaware of its presence, short, without any awareness of her nudity, and without confronting the viewer. She, of course, obliged. But as the photo session progressed, Lisa's own idea of nudity began to emerge along with her personality, and she took control of the shoot. She began to glance at the camera, then flirt with it, and to dress and undress in the most relaxed manner, totally unselfconscious, confident in her beauty yet without arrogance. A few weeks later, when Silke started work on the drawings, he sorted through the photos he'd taken to decide on which ones to draw. He figured he was going to draw the ones he'd planned on, but the more he looked at the pictures, the more he was attracted to the ones where Lisa had taken control, the ones you see on these pages.

Silke, as I've pointed out, is a relic of the twentieth century, and his idea of nudity dates back to the fifties or earlier, while Lisa is a contemporary woman. Consequently, Silke realized, "Her poses are more honest. They're more her, and I was compelled to draw them."

That is simply how Silke works. Despite his personal visions, when the model confronts him, the spell she casts and the mystery she invokes take control, and he has no choice but to let her take charge. She can turn, twist, or sprawl as she chooses. She is now the photographer, storyteller, and designer as well as performer, and he follows her commands.

Realizing this, Silke believes that if there is any value present in his bare naked ladies, any quality of redemption, then it's in the girl.









DEVIL WOMEN

*"I like smooth shiny girls,
hardboiled and loaded with sin."*

—Raymond Chandler/*Farewell My Lovely* (1940)

All right! Here it is, the big finale where the artist's heavy hitting ideas and high powered emotions collide in a fabulous display of all his stylistic devices to produce a grand parade of profound and dazzling beauties in a "wow" finish. And what does Silke come up with? Big guns, large knives, and vampires.

I don't get it. It's silly. Comic book shtick.

Traditionally, glamour art has no place for guns, swords, spears, or any other hint at real devilry, no darkness whatsoever. It destroys the illusion. Destroys that light-minded ambience, carefree excitement, and feeling of good times being had by all that Silke relishes.

But Silke insists.

Now, I know men Silke's age do all kinds of childish things, play with toy trains, collect expensive sports cars, fall in love with whores, marry trophy wives, and drink Jack Daniels from a milk glass. Some even have the imagination to put the muzzle of a shotgun in their mouths and pull the trigger with a thumb. They're close enough to the end of the trail to see it clearly and so either want to get it over with or to party as hard as they can until it is.

But that's not Silke. He'll never retire, and if he just wanted to have fun, then he has a wife with enough party in her for a regiment of Marines. So what's going on?

"I'm not really sure," Silke admits. "As odd as it may seem, I am still new at this business of painting pin-ups. And right now, at this stage in my work, for reasons


I don't fully understand, putting a gun in the hand of a defiant, impossibly beautiful woman evokes in me a light-minded joy that comes as close as I can get to that spirit of the commedia dell'arte. Undoubtedly this has something to do with my obsession with the female mystery and belief that strong women will eventually be the solution to the problems in our culture. Then again, maybe I'm just reverting to my childhood."

Well, that last part, at least, makes some sense.

Silke drew his first gun-toting devil woman when he was nine years old, Milton Caniff's Dragon Lady.

"Her exotic Eurasian beauty was simply too much for my boiling hormones to cope with.





That green blouse of hers, with the top button always missing so that it gaped open, was constantly being torn and ripped in, to my point of view, precisely the right places."

But the Dragon Lady's big attraction was the fact that she was dangerous. Deadly. She used her beauty to captivate and manipulate men and then trampled them like insects. On occasion, she did allow herself to kiss a man, but never let herself love one. She was a beauty and a beast, and she challenged little Jimmie because she didn't behave the way you were supposed to in his puritan, romantic vision of the world. Consequently, she triggered young Silke's incorrigible imagination and insatiable curiosity, leading him to suspect, with anticipation, that there were untold worlds of wonder and delight out there somewhere for him to find.

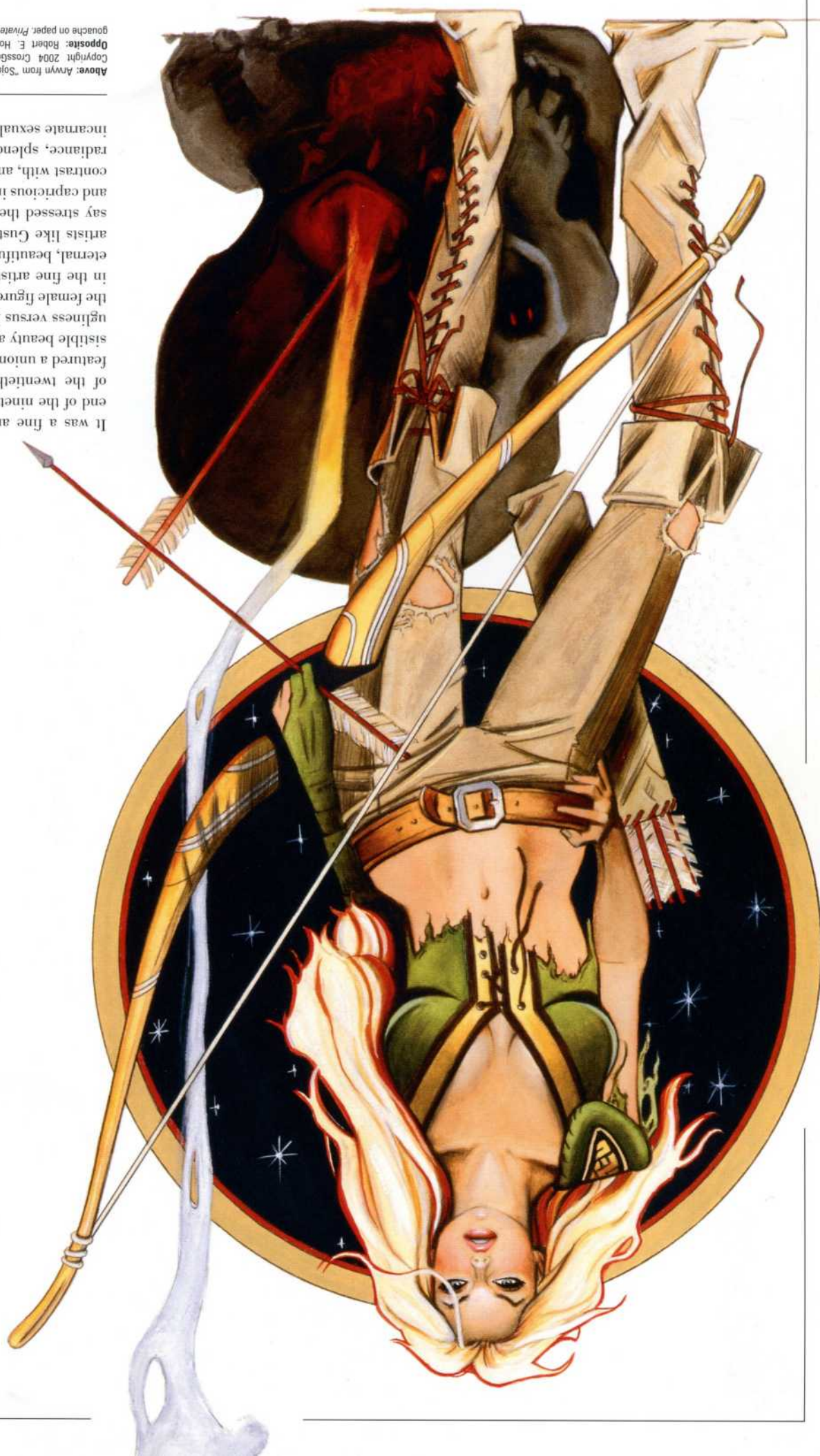
Strangely enough, little Jimmie's Bible studies did the same thing. "You can't read that book without being beguiled by Judith, Delilah, Jezebel, and Salome. And it doesn't take much imagination to suspect there is a lot more to their stories than the Bible reveals. Consequently, I wanted to know all about those dames. I mean, here was all the stuff of great drama, temptation, seduction, sin, violence, redemption, the triumph of evil and the defeat of the just. And these women weren't against it. They were for it.

By searching through libraries and old book stores, Silke not only discovered the other side of those stories, but that he was attracted to other women with the same devilish appetites: Cleopatra, Messalina, Theodora, Lucrezia Borgia, Carmen, Lola Montez, Mata Hari, Lady de Winter, Caroline Cherie, Sadie Thompson, and a host of others.

"I loved them all, along with all of Caniff's devil dolls: Miss Lace, Rogue, Madam Sanjak, Delta, Cheeta, The Maid of Nine, and the Duchess of Denver. And at this moment in time, even though I admire a woman most for her smile and laughter, I'd rather draw her when she's angry and armed. The mere presence of a weapon, a gun, sword, or knife in her hand represents her threat. It makes her dangerous. Exotic costumes help, but it is the weapon in hand that seems essential. It implies high-risk physical dangers, an adventure narrative with suspense, mystery, and drama. Pain. Death. Misery. And triumph."

Oddly enough, this beautiful beast aesthetic that addicts Silke didn't come from the comic strips, but from high culture.

Left: Claudia Cardinale as a pirate, pencil and gouache on cardboard. Private Collection.



It was a fine art motif that emerged at the end of the nineteenth century and beginning of the twentieth century, an aesthetic that featured a union of dread and delight, of irresistible beauty and mortal danger, of ugliness versus beauty and joy. In those days the female figure was still the primary subject in the fine artists' quest to connect with the eternal, beautiful and truthful. Consequently, artists like Gustav Klimt and Norman Lindsay stressed the cruel, predatory, insatiable, and capricious in the female image in order to contrast with, and make more believable, her radiant, splendor, physical perfection, and incarnate sexual stimulus.





Above: Linda Darnell as Miranda Cross in "Ruse," watercolor and gouache on paper. Copyright 2004 CrossGeneration Comics, Inc. **Opposite:** Vampi with a gun and without bangs, ink, watercolor, and gouache on paper. *Vampirella* copyright 2004 by Harris Publications, Inc.

What they came up with were some real nasty girls, what today's politically correct critics refer to as devil women.

Some smart boys had started to define these women back in the middle 1800s. Philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche had seen women as voluptuous, amoral predators. Poet Charles Baudelaire claimed women were the incarnation of evil. And poet Georges de Feure stated, "Woman is consumed by a selfish love, given to all excesses, the trunk where all vices spring, the source of all the ills, the soul of every forbidden delight." These guys were serious dudes, so they were either on to something they didn't really understand, or had some personal problems. Whatever, they scared people.

You must remember that I'm not discussing the twenty-first century, or any of the Eastern cultures, but Christian Europe during a period in which Puritan thought and morality controlled both the conscious and unconscious lives of the overwhelming majority of people. The populace fooled around a lot, particularly the rich, and people stole, deceived and murdered just like today, but in those days they felt really guilty about it, particularly about their sexual indiscretions. The prevailing idea was this—if men wanted to stay healthy and in control, they needed to guard their vital juices from essence-stealing man-eaters.

The paranoia was that sex could kill you. The problem was that the beauties appearing on stage, in novels, the ballet, and paintings were saying that it just might be worth it.



Silke
03

According to Silke's historical hocus-pocus, this is what happened: the Eternal Nymph had finally decided to show her serious side, her strength, so she cast off the clownish roles she'd played on the illegitimate stage and took center stage not only in the legitimate theater, but also in novels, poems, paintings, and the ballet. As she did, she gave up her lighthearted, big-foot humor and took on a dark, satanic amorality. She became a nightmare woman who enjoyed enslaving men, and stealing their power and pride. She knew that men fall for this kind of stuff, and the arts portrayal of her suddenly began to make them fall hard.

The prime example of the Nymph's new role was Oscar Wilde's *Salome*. He wrote it in the 1890s, but the censors did not allow it to be performed in England until 1918. It was just too dangerous, because *Salome* was portrayed as a sexy child in a sadomasochistic relationship with John the Baptist. She was the totally profane "femme fatale," both a virgin and dominatrix. Her story held all the erotic ingredients, dance, desire, death, dismemberment, and both the Christian and pagan ecstasies. It was set in the East, which to white folks was an erotic playground, a realm of ancient mystery, of the harem, Odalisque, Scheherazade, the Sphinx, and the "yellow peril." A place of sexual license where passion and violence rule.

Pierre Louys' novel, *The Woman and the Puppet*, also disturbed the status quo. It's the story of a man who degrades himself for a powerful, independent, self-determining beauty who, in another sadomasochistic romance featuring adultery and prostitution, incites her male lover to murder without remorse or sentiment. The book was condemned, but in time the story would appear again and again, as did Frank Wedekind's *Lulu* plays and Richard Strauss' opera *Salome* in which the child-woman has John the Baptist beheaded because he refuses to satisfy her lust. In these stories, as well as in the paintings and poems of men like Klimt, Lindsay, Paul Verlaine, and Thomas Mann, there was a desire to establish contact with the elemental in life, with a vital and irrepressible energy, with the Eternal Nymph. They believed in the continuity of life as a fundamental aspect of their art, and while that continuity, like the images and prose they produced, was erotic, brutal, violent, and tragic beyond individual fate, it was an essential reaffirmation of life.

The critical high point of this movement, and of high art in the twentieth century, came in Paris in May 1913 with the presentation of Igor Stravinsky's ballet *The Rite of Spring*. It was a ritual of birth and death in pagan

Russia, a ballet created to evoke the mystery and great surge of creative power that arrives each spring. The performers were the infamous and brilliant dancer Vaclav Nijinsky and the Ballets Russes de Diaghilev.

Both Nijinsky and Serge Diaghilev, the most famous maestro/producer of the last century, were masterminds of provocation. They had presented overt eroticism in their ballet productions of *Scheherazade* and *The Afternoon of the Faun*, but the eroticism in *The Rite of Spring* was an open rebellion against Christian morality.

The reaction of the critics and audience was shock and surprise. On opening night, cries of condemnation and acclamation erupted from the crowd of celebrities as well as from the bourgeoisie. People had been scandalized



and portions of the audience fled the theater in rage, while others cried tears of joy.

Lust, not God, had now become sacred.

Nijinsky and Diaghilev believed, as did Andre Gide, Marcel Proust, Louys, and other rebels of high culture at that time, that the artist must be amoral, without sexual morality. This was a total departure from the mores of the time. Nevertheless, the problems of beauty and the human form were primary in their work, and this was in strict adherence to the motifs and standards that the classicist believed to be necessary in the pursuit of art.

Today, our politically correct critics condemn this early femme-fatale movement,

claiming their efforts were just and for men to impose their childish, male "dream girl" vision of the female unsuspecting world. That, no doubt, occurred. Men do that. But while the vision of Stravinsky, Wilde, Klimt, Lindsay and others may have been awkward and incomplete, they may have only scratched the surface of what was to come, their visions of a new spiritual and religious presence within the human condition, a force of creativity and destruction that was promising to change the world—a female force that the ladies never got a chance.

The next year, in August of 1914, World War I began and for four years the world tore itself apart. After the war, the entire culture landscape changed.

Shaken by the horrors of the war, and the failure of the civilized world to prevent the once self-assured leaders of high culture—religious, political, and artistic—from losing faith in nearly all the pre-war institutions, and began to abandon them to tear them down. Eager to join the revolution, many of the major artists abandoned the ideas, spirit, and aesthetics of the past. Being perceived as a rebel became a compulsion. Consequently, surprise, shock, and innovation became the central motifs of the modernist movement, and still are. Some modernist art is indeed revolutionary and brilliant, but it abandoned the incalculable sexual stimulus that drives the continuation of life and rejected all narrative and figurative subject matter, particularly the female image. In short, it muted itself, consequently had nothing to say or express about the essential motif of the Twentieth century, the freeing of the female from male domination and her resurrection as a sexual force in our lives.

Well, that's how Silke sees it. He, of course, was not around for all of this, having been born until 1931. What he knows about it he learned late in life, but as he was growing up, the influences of Wilde, Louys, Stravinsky, and others could be found everywhere he looked. Why? Because the vast majority of the world's creative talents were at the beginning of the Twentieth century found far more opportunity and freedom in the suddenly exploding world of the illegitimate arts, in low culture.

The Eternal Nymph, of course, was already bumping, grinding, and flashing her stuff in the circus, carnivals, vaudeville and

burlesque houses, and the fabulous Broadway girl revues. Crowds of artists, writers, costume designers, art directors, hair stylists, and photographers who still venerated the lure of the female and her generative spirit quickly followed her onto these stages. And then, with the advent of silent films, they followed her onto the silver screen. There, she did her act as a vamp in the form of Theda Bara, Pola Negri, and a host of other silent femme fatales, and as the "It Girl" in the person of Clara Bow.

Silke was too young to see those beauties romp about in the darkness at the picture show. He could only find glimpses of them in old magazines until 1966 when he created the film exhibit for Expo 67, and finally got access to the major studio vaults to view the old silent films. But when "talkies" arrived he was right there in the balconies of Oakland's *Roxie*, *Fox Oakland*, *Central*, *Grand Lake*, and *T&D* theaters where the lure of the pagan female captured his innocent eyes; Jean Harlow in *Red Dust*, Maureen O'Sullivan in *Tarzan and His Mate*, and Marlene Dietrich in *The Devil Is a Woman*, *Shanghai Express*, and *The Scarlet Empress*. "They all had their way with me, and so did Paulette Goddard, Claire Trevor, Ida Lupino, and Barbara Stanwyck."



Above and opposite: Vampirella, ink, watercolor, and gouache on paper. Vampirella copyright Harris Publications, Inc. Private Collections.



In 1935, Pierre Louys' *The Woman and the Devil* reemerged in the form of *The Devil Is a Woman* starring Marlene Dietrich. It had trouble with the film censors, but was made again in 1950 with María Félix in the lead role, then again in 1958 with Brigitte Bardot in a flick titled *A Woman Like Satan*. And Silke saw them all.

And when film noir arrived, he was right there in the darkness again to watch the she-devils heat up things in films like *Human Desire*, *Blonde Fever*, *Kiss Me Deadly*, *Pushover*, and a hundred others. In this dark world, locked and loaded women wrecked havoc with hardboiled dicks, gumshoes, cops, stick-up men, gangsters, and other assorted losers, schemers, and do-gooders. The boys, except on rare occasions, are simply no match for the jaundiced lives and moral wreckage these dolls flaunted.

"They weren't all bad, of course," says Silke, "just the interesting ones." Silke's favorites, however, were the women created by the hardboiled crime writers.

Chester Himes' Imabelle in *A Rage In Harlem*: "Now Jackson could see the eye and its mate plainly. A high-yellow sensual face was framed in the light of the door. It was Imabelle's face. She was looking steadily into Jackson's eyes. Her lips formed the words, 'Come on in and kill him, daddy. I'm all yours.'"

Raymond Chandler's Dolores Gonzales in *The Little Sister* who murdered for love: "She leaned back and a pulse beat in her throat. She was exquisite, she was dark, she was deadly. And nothing would touch her, not even the law."

Dashiell Hammett's Brigid O'Shaughnessy in *The Maltese Falcon*: "'I haven't lived a good life,' she cried. 'I've been bad—worse than you could know—but I'm not all bad. Look at me, Mr. Spade. You know I'm not all bad, don't you? You can see that, can't you?'"

When the 1950s arrived, and Gina Lollobrigida, Brigitte Bardot, Sophia Loren, and Claudia Cardinale lit up the darkness at the picture shows, Silke found his adult muses. "They all had an unwashed beauty to them, and an edge, a dark side. And I wasn't the only one who found them irresistible. All of us whose job of work was fiction and fantasy were tired of the glitter and perfection with which the Hollywood film



Opposite: Bettie Page, cover for the trade paperback edition of *Betty Page: Queen of the Nite*. Ink, watercolor, and gouache. Private Collection. Right: *Vampi at Home*, ink, watercolor, and gouache on paper. Vampirella copyright Harris Publications, Inc.



industry continued to create their heroes. We wanted our beauties to sweat when they made love, just like the European stars."

Oddly enough, however, the beauties created by the pin-up artists had almost no influence on Silke's formative years.

"Like everyone else, I never took them seriously. They were simply naughty trivia. Even when I got to art school, and began to develop an appreciation for some of the pin-up artist work, I still wanted it to be better than it was to be more stylish, tasteful, and artistic. I couldn't admit to myself how much I liked the work of Petty and Bolles. And then, when I finally did admit it, I still wanted to somehow justify it, to find hidden values in it just as I had in Dietrich, Stanwyck, Mary Astor, Cardinale and Bardot. And that compulsion is still at play. I want to, in some way, emulate those actresses, to recreate their female strength and beauty. That's probably why I draw them so frequently. And somehow, when I put a gun in the hand of one of my pin-ups, I feel like I'm close to creating an image that reaffirms the power of the female—reaffirms the continuity of life—just as Dietrich, Stanwyck, Astor, Bardot, and Cardinale did for me.

But when Silke talks like this to his buddy Dave Stevens, Stevens will listen politely for awhile, then he'll laugh and say, "Baloney, Silke! All you want to do is jump their bones!"

"Maybe Dave's right. But maybe that's the justification? Maybe if I want to jump them, then maybe the viewer will, and I've done my job?"

His job? Hmmm, that sounds like we're dealing with Kipling's philosophy again, which reminds me of something. Silke is married to a very loving, no-nonsense, straight-shooting, and occasionally dangerous woman. Consequently, if you sense any real strength or reality in the devil women you see on these pages, or if you're of a practical frame of mind and need a concrete rather than an abstract reason to explain Silke's obsession with strong women, then I suggest you consider Kurtessa. She's a Chicago Southside girl raised in the projects, a single mother and a survivor who is now the vice-president of a bank, and whose life's story is as far from her husband's as it's possible to get. Therefore, whenever he gets too childish, too wrapped up in his fleshy fantasies, and particularly when he

Left: Halle Berry—a strong woman with a gun is even stronger. Pencil and gouache on colored paper.

starts taking himself too seriously, he is, once again, subject to a sudden, sharp blow upside the head. And, fortunately for him, he is no longer quick enough to duck.

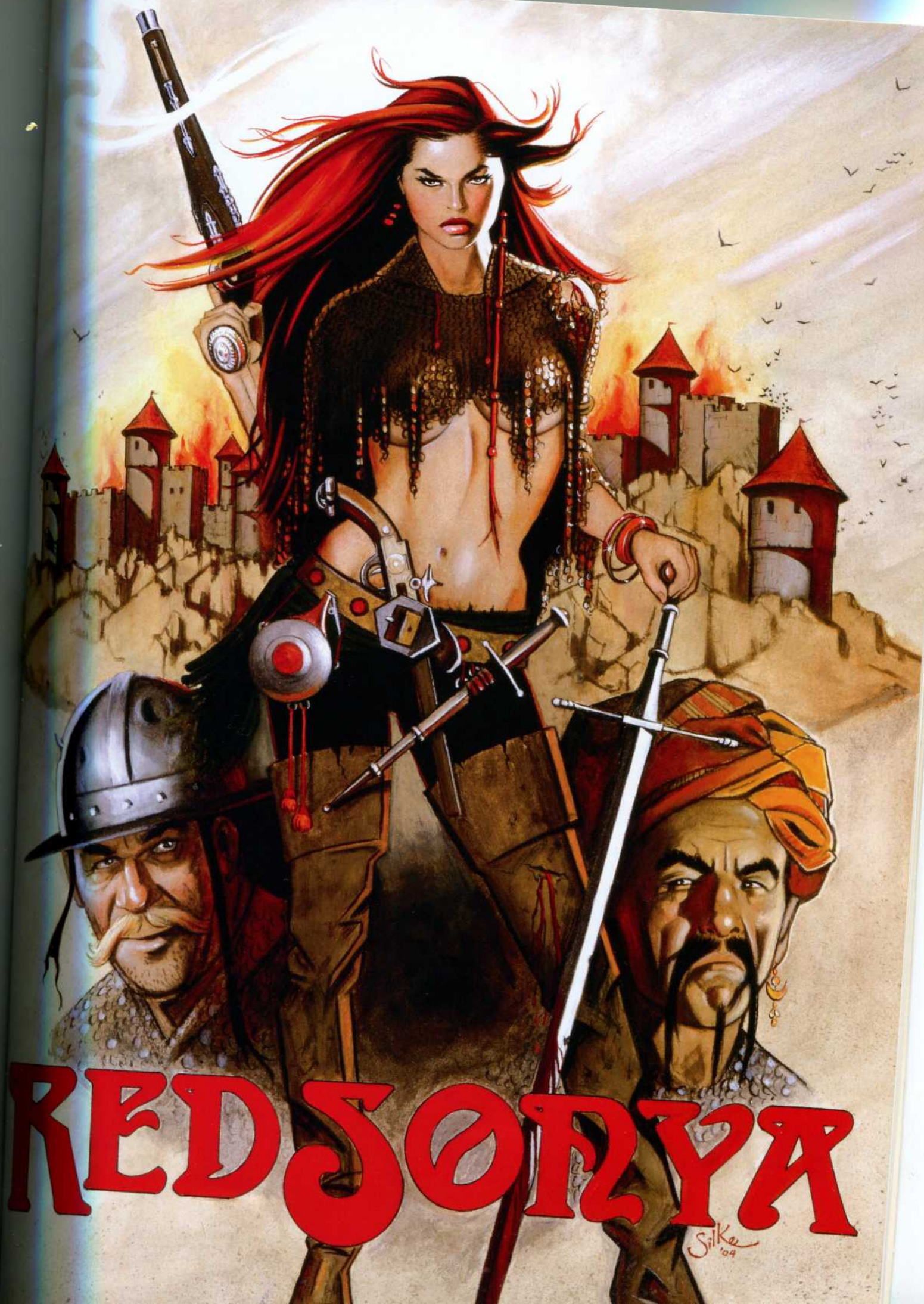
Silke won't argue about that, but somewhere inside him he'd still like to think his devil women are his attempt to find a quality of redemption in the voluptuous joy and gaudy dazzle of a gutsy dame. Well, maybe. But the only real certainty in his life is the work. His current obsession is devil women. But tomorrow, who knows? Right now he has a penchant for placing his dangerous beauties in the company of one of those battered, battle-worn adventurers who dare to pursue him. With all the people that influence him, and all the books he reads along with his ever-present imagination and curiosity, he could abandon his devil woman obsession in a minute. Even give up being a glamour artist. Will he? Not even he knows for sure. That's how it is in his world.

Anything goes.

Right: Robert E. Howard's Dejah Thoris, version two, ink, watercolor, and gouache on paper. Copyright 2004 Robert E. Howard Properties. Private Collection. Following spread, left: Donessa Hidalgo from "Lady Sin," ink watercolor, and gouache on paper. Copyright 2004 CrossGeneration Comics, Inc. Private Collection. Right: Robert E. Howard's Red Sonya as she appears in his short story *Shadow of the Vulture*. Ink, watercolor, and gouache on paper. Copyright 2004 Robert E. Howard Properties.







RED SORRYA



Above: *Spicy and the Wary Recruit*, ink, watercolor, and gouache on paper. Opposite: *Trail's End*, posed by Silke and his wife, Kurtesa, ink, watercolor, and gouache on paper. Private Collection.



HOWARD PYLE



J.C. LEYENDECKER



NORMAN ROCKWELL



APPENDIX: ILLEGITIMATE ART

Throughout almost our entire history, artists created their work for the enjoyment of the clergy and the socially and financially elite, for the privileged classes that made up high culture. Most of those artists came from the same group. For around ten thousand years, two to three percent of the people controlled the art world.

The vast majority of the common people had no say in it. But around 1890, events conspired to give them a voice.

At that time, the sale of artwork consisted almost entirely of original work. The primary markets were in Paris, Berlin, London, and Rome, and in a minor way New York and Philadelphia. Art schools were in the same places. In these urban centers, a small group of artists thrived artistically and financially while a slightly larger group, supported by family wealth, thought they were thriving, and an even larger group went hungry. From this latter group came the legend of the "starving artist."

There were exceptions. Illustrated books provided a market for a small but excellent group of artists who, due to the limited abilities of the printing process, worked almost exclusively in black and white. But books were too expensive to produce in large numbers, and only the rich and wealthy middle-class could afford them. The other

exception was a group of painters in France called Impressionists: Degas, Lautrec, Manet, Van Gogh, Renoir, Seurat, Gauguin, Pissaro, and so forth. They rebelled against the prevailing tastes in fine art and experimented with subject matter and techniques. For a period of time, the consumers of art rejected their work, but as time passed and their work became familiar, it sold to the same two to three percent. To the elite.

Common people contented themselves with what they saw in churches and museums, and in the crude artwork appearing in the newspapers, almanacs, and penny dreadfuls, the predecessors to pulps.

Then things changed radically.

In 1890, there were only four major magazines available to the American public living in metropolitan areas, primarily on the East Coast, *Harper's*, *Scribner's*, *Century*, and *Munsey's*. Each sold for thirty-five cents an issue and had a circulation of about 100,000. These magazines featured articles and fiction illustrated by artists who worked in the classic narrative tradition. Their paintings and pen drawings were reproduced in black and white by crude woodblock engravings which cost around \$300 each, and which took two to three weeks to produce. Both the artist and the engraver got credit on the printed picture.

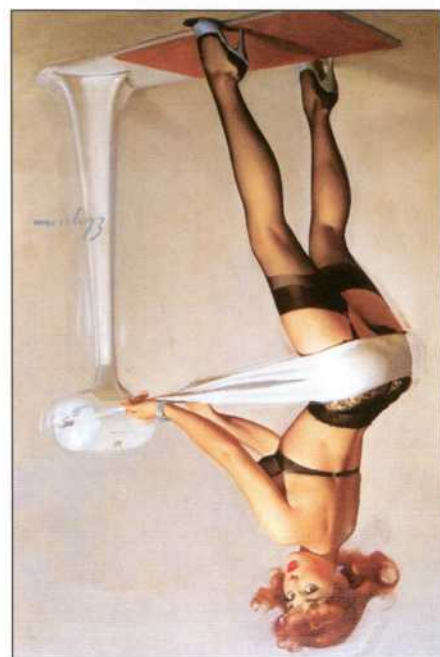
Fifteen years later, in 1905, there were 7,500 magazines being published, and they were available everywhere in the U.S. On average, each magazine sold between 50,000 and 300,000 copies a month. The majority of them featured artwork by a steadily growing number of excellent artists, and a few of them even printed pictures in color. The same phenomenon was occurring throughout Europe, but the greatest growth was in America. The general public could finally find pictures created expressly for them at their local magazine stand, or in their mailbox.

In addition, starving artists all over the world finally had a marketplace. A profession. Art had become a career not exclusively for the wealthy, but for anyone with the talent. A lucrative career.

What happened?

In the early 1890s, the major magazines began to use a new engraving process, photo engraving, invented in the mid 1880s. This process cut engraving time to two hours and the cost to twenty dollars. The invention of wood pulp paper and fast rotary presses also cut costs and time. In addition, literacy rose in America along with leisure time. At the beginning of the twentieth century color engraving was invented, and in 1902 the U.S. Postal Service instituted rural free delivery.

GILLETTE ELVGREN



For those reasons, Silke calls the field "illegitimate art."

But the revolution making the visual arts available to the masses was only part of a much greater revolution. Due to developments in technology, almost all the artistic disciplines underwent transformations as dramatic as those in the visual arts and almost the same time, making the twentieth century the century of the illegitimate arts.

Starting in the late 1890s, the talented, the less talented, and the untalented in every field of the arts rushed to the new marketplaces, movies, radio, magazines, paperback novels, and television, resulting in tons and tons of cheap, vulgar, and sentimental stories, songs, pictures, books, and motion pictures, and scattered among them were the finest works of art of the twentieth century. The rush, of course, continues to this day.

But for reasons too complex to discuss here, from around the 1960s on the illegitimate arts have flourished as merchandise and floundered as art, as eventually they had to. During the last forty or so years, there seemed to be more opportunity than ever for creative talent, but the manufacturers of popular culture had discovered that they are able to fabricate a product that is just good enough to make them millions of dollars without surrendering control to the imaginations and visions of the best talent available. No doubt there are talents out there today

ROBERT MCGINNIS



who are trying to overcome this obstacle, and hopefully they will succeed, but at this point the chances appear slim.

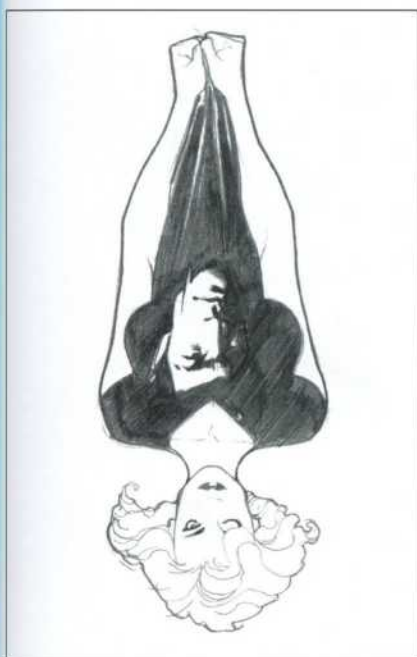
But, as Silke fully understands, they always have been.

Today, pin-up art is still socially and morally unacceptable, and still illegitimate even though no longer a popular culture art form. Only one contemporary artist, Olivia, has a truly national audience, and the best of the painters of women, Robert McGinnis, who made his mark painting dangerous ladies for paperback covers, has gone legitimate.

Currently, the largest number of girl artists work in the comic book field, and a few, such as Adam Hughes and Dave Stevens, produce gorgeous, nubile lovelies who romp and flirt on comic book covers to convey, not only the power of the nymph, but her spirit. But comic books themselves are also no longer a mass-culture item. A good sale for a comic today is around 30,000 copies, where they once sold in hundreds of thousands, even millions.

The loss of a mass audience has, of course, altered the nature of pin-up art, and it no longer derives its spirit or style from the illegitimate theater, from the spirit and style that originally gave it its power, but from some other source of inspiration. As Silke sees it, the young girl artists in the comic book field seem to not only have lost control over that overly ambitious hormone

ADAM HUGHES



which has always plagued pin-up artists, but are being driven by some other stimulant. "Either they're aping our current culture where the surface is everything and the spirit and soul are forgotten, or they're high on something besides testosterone. Something that can only be satisfied by industrial strength beauties who can not be seduced without the help of a wrench, motor oil, and a handgun. Consequently, they're producing all variety of rubber girls, vinyl girls, leather ladies, and mechanical bimbos with metal breasts and hydroelectric nipples."

But as I've hopefully made clear, Silke is a relic of the past. He'd like to understand what the young comic book artists are up to, but doesn't. "I don't know. Maybe they are the future, and maybe it will all work out somehow. Maybe someday someone will say about them what someone once said about Oscar Wilde: 'Oscar's so good at the extras that he doesn't need the essentials.'"

Whatever. The one certainty is this: it is inevitable that the illegitimate arts of any age will produce a huge mass of forgettable trash. That's their nature. But it is just as true that from that trash great art can emerge, just as it did during the first half of the twentieth century. Besides, not even Silke would be reckless enough to try and predict what the Eternal Nymph might decide to do. She might even be tickled pink by a little hydroelectric technology.



Jim Silke at his studio in Woodland Hills, CA. Photo by Greg Preston.

**Starlets and showgirls. Hollywood heavies.
Comic-book heroes and corrupt virgins.
Pagans, teasers, and nude goddesses.
Welcome to the delights of carnal temptation—
to the world of the pin-up.**

Few artists could tell a story like Jim Silke's—an artistic coming-of-age tale populated by the world's most gorgeous women, with creative geniuses like Sam Peckinpah and Alfred Hitchcock in supporting roles. From his Grammy Award-winning stint as a music industry art director to his years as a magazine publisher, glamour photographer, screenwriter, and comic-book artist, Silke's sensual vision has made a distinct and lasting impact on contemporary culture. Now, for the first time, Silke shares his charming and insightful account of life as a pin-up artist. With sharp prose, stellar wit, and a dazzling array of delicious portraiture, Silke captures every curve in his titillating career, from his first encounter with a live nude model, to his enraptured slaving over illustrated images of Bettie Page, Brigitte Bardot, and scores of other legendary lovelies.

Lavishly illustrated with over 100 new images by Silke and classic pin-up artists George Petty, Coby Whitmore, Enoch Bolles, Al Parker, Rolf Armstrong, and others, *Pin-Up: The Illegitimate Art* is a smart and sassy romp through the twentieth century's love affair with pin-ups. Autobiographical, academic, and utterly audacious, this book is a must-read for lady lovers and pop-culture enthusiasts of any generation.

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